TRANSCRIBING FOR CLASSICAL GUITAR: HISTORY AND EXAMPLES FROM LITERATURE, WITH THREE ESSAYS FROM DIFFERENT STYLES AND INSTRUMENTS

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Introduction

This research focuses on the practice of transcription for classical guitar, a musical tradition that has been carried through centuries and is still one of the main sources of present days' guitar repertoire. Every guitarist is familiar with transcriptions, used as a pedagogical tool for the very first learning stages, as well as a means to expand guitar's repertoire with notable and challenging pieces. In some ways, as Richard Yates notes, "all guitarists are transcribers."[1] This might be exaggerating, but it is indeed true that more than other instrumentalists, guitarists are acquainted with transcriptions in a way that enables a constant search for new possibilities for their instrument.

The first part of this document will deal with the problem of transcription from an ontological point of view: what is a transcription and what aesthetical problems does it carry? The specific case of transcribing for guitar will be analyzed more in detail, with a historical survey of the art of arranging from its origins until the present days, through some exemplary cases. Guitar transcription will be then approached from a technical point of view, by looking at two of the most common cases: transcribing from a keyboard instrument and from a bowed string instrument.

This historical and theoretical analysis will be propaedeutic to three essays in the art of transcription. The pieces, by three composers of three different ages (Johann Sebastian Bach, Richard Wagner, and Eugène Ysaÿe), fit well within the tradition of transcriptions for classical guitar, both in their original instrument destination (harpsichord, piano, and violin) and for their characteristics, as it will be explained below. By transcribing three important and challenging pieces, the intent is that of expanding the guitar repertoire while staying in the path of a long-

1 Richard Yates, "The Transcriber's Art", *Soundboard* 22, no. 3 (1996), 25.

lasting tradition. A transcription says a lot about the piece itself, obviously, but also about the instrument it is conceived for, and no doubt, about the transcriber himself.

Chapter 1: Transcribing Music

It is almost impossible to trace the history of transcription and arrangement (these two terms will be explained below) in music. It seems that the practice of playing a piece of music or a song on an instrument different than its original destination[1] has always been applied to a wide range of repertoires and any history of this practice will at some point encounter its ultimate limits in the lack of written documentation. For the narrow needs of this research, I will present some exemplary cases that will allow me to draw some conclusions of the different aesthetic implications of this practice, in the limited case of plucked string instruments (the guitar and other similar instruments).

The lute and Spanish *vihuela* repertoires are often regarded as a sort of pre-history of the guitar repertoire. While this is to some extent incorrect (for the simple reason that, contemporary to the lute and the *vihuela*, instruments that were organologically closer to the guitar were already existing), it is true that guitarists have always regarded these two important traditions as the 'entrance point' of plucked string instruments in the higher forms of art music. In fact, during its short life,[2] the *vihuela* (together with the organ) was regarded as the most important polyphonic instrument, and it attracted the attention of performers, composers, and theorists. At the same time, and for a much longer period, the lute was revered as the 'king' of musical instruments in other European countries. Versatility and richness of expression were the most commonly praised qualities of both instruments, and became key factors that performers and composers started to seek in the classical guitar centuries later.

The link with these two instruments is therefore very important for the history of the guitar, and

1 Assuming the piece or song has a precise instrumental destination. There are repertoires where that is not the case, and in western music it seems that the tendency is to go from a general openness to a more precise determination as the history of music progresses.

2 The collections of music for *vihuela* were all published between 1536 and 1576.

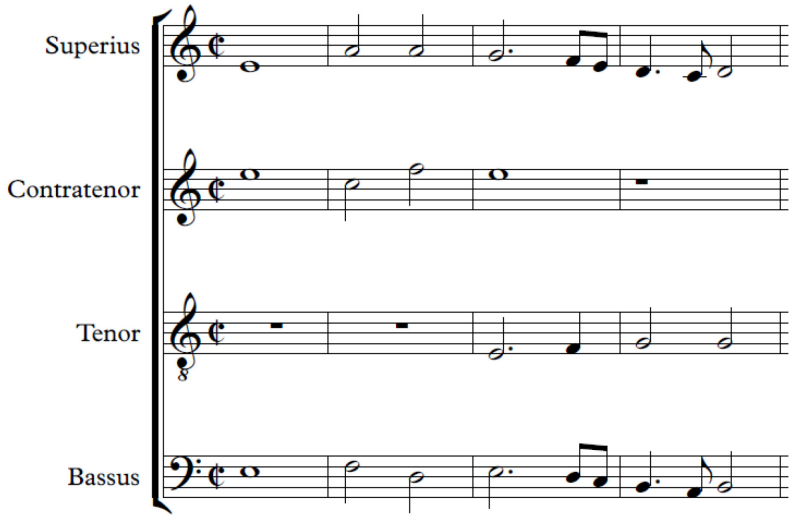
it has an important implication for the matter I am analyzing here: from the very beginning, their repertoire consisted also of arrangements of music not specifically written for them. The very first printed collection of lute music (the one by Francesco Spinacino printed by Ottaviano Petrucci in 1507)[3] already contains versions of songs or madrigals by famous renaissance composers, Josquin Desprez above all. The name of Josquin appears also in the *vihuela* collections: one of the most famous pieces for that instrument, known as "Cancion del Emperador" (being a favorite of the king of Spain) is nothing else than a re-arrangement written by Luis de Narvaez of a *chanson* by Josquin, *Milles regretz*. Willaert, Gombert, Arcadelt, and many other composers were often paraphrased by lutenists and vihuelists, showing how contemporary audience and players were eager to reproduce on the plucking strings some of the most famous polyphonic settings of the time. This brief summary of early transcriptions poses the first question on why and how these were composed: I posit that some of the premises of these early examples will still be valid for later guitar transcriptions. I will briefly address two issues that are of capital importance, one related to the aesthetical justification of the act of transcribing a pre-existing piece of music, the other more related to the technique of the arrangement (for now, arrangement and transcription are used as synonyms, but a discrimination will be necessary later).

1) Why were these arrangements composed? It is impossible to give one single answer to this basic question, and the reason for every transcription is probably to be found in a mix of different needs. Given the titles of the earliest examples from the lute and *vihuela* repertoires, we can certainly emphasize the reason mentioned above: some of these pieces were already becoming standard repertoire, widely available in manuscript

3 Joan Ambrosio Dalza, Ottaviano Petrucci, Paolo Cherici, and Francesco Spinacino. *Antologia Delle Intavolature Di Ottaviano Petrucci: Venezia, 1507-1508.* Milano: Edizioni S. Zerboni, 2000

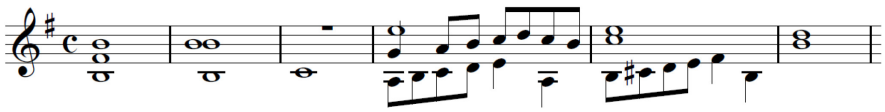
copies and early prints[4]. it was music that members of most courts enjoyed singing and listening to, therefore lutenists and vihuelists were adapting their work to that taste, offering music that would sound familiar. In addition, both the lute and *vihuela* were portable instruments, allowing an immediate reproduction of any tune. Another reason might be somewhat subtler: for instruments that were starting to receive attention by major composers, theorists, printers, and patrons, it was key to prove to be able to deal with the highest art forms. Narvaez, Da Milano, and all of their contemporaries, probably wanted to prove that their instruments could render the most intricate polyphonic passages and all the nuances of that music. This need of gaining legitimacy would also be very important centuries later for the case of guitar transcription.

2) How did the virtuosos of the time approach vocal works when it came to adapt it for their instruments? Let's see a brief example, taken from the piece cited above, the *Cancion del Emperador* by Narvaez, compared with the original by Josquin (ex. 1 and 2).



Example 1: Josquin Desprez, *Milles Regrets,* modern clefs and notation

4 Obviously, we are talking of a wide distribution in relative terms, since early prints were still very expensive and not available to a broad public.



Example 2: Luys de Narvaez, *Cancion del emperador,* modern notation.

As we can see, the chords plucked on the *vihuela* try to reproduce the vertical sonorities of the vocal score. From the third chord, the space between these harmonies is filled with scalar sections and melodic ornamentation. This reflects a very idiomatic way of writing for the *vihuela*: the so-called technique of *consonancias y redobles* (already introduced by the first *vihuela* master, Luys Milan), that alternates plucked chords (*consonancias*) with fast scalar passages (*redobles*).[5] This would seem a clever adaptation to the resources and the characteristics of the destination instrument, a virtue of every good transcription. Also, the solution minimizes one of the weaknesses of the instrumentswhich is not having the ability to sustain sounds for too long. While voices can beautifully sustain the first chords in a homophonic fashion, the same technique would sound poorly on the *vihuela*. Narvaez ornaments selected voices (first the alto, then the bass) in order to compensate for the inevitable fading out of sounds. Thus, the result is a minimization of a translation problem, while emphasizing the peculiarities of the destination instrument.

These two very broad questions, applied to guitar transcriptions over the centuries, are consistently present in this research: every transcription inevitably has a reason for its existence (a need that urged the transcriber) and also solves the inevitable technical problems in creative ways. The following chapters will try to answer the following questions: what could be defined

5 Not unlike the modern *flamenco* style or the *divisions* in the lute pieces of the 16th and 17th centuries in England.

as a transcription, what would push any composer or instrumentalist to transcribe an existing piece of music, how transcriptions for guitar emerged through time, and how the transcribing process is technically carried on for the classical guitar. This latter question will be answered with a special focus on the original instruments that guide this research (keyboard instruments and violin).

Chapter 2: Transcribing for Guitar

2.1 Transcription: a Definition

In order to better understand the problems linked to transcribing for guitar, in this chapter I will try to outline an ontology of transcriptions in music, following the taxonomy proposed by Stephen Davies.[1]

According to Davies,

> if a musical score is a musical transcription of a musical work, *X*, it must be the intention of the producer of the score to write a work faithful to the musical content of *X* while writing for and in a way appropriate to a medium other than that for which *X* is written.[2]

Davies adds a condition to this, stating that "the musical content of the transcriber's score should adequately resemble and preserve the musical content of the original work."[3] In other words, the 'work' must keep its identity in the new version. With a small *caveat* on the use of the term "score," which can lead to misunderstandings (it is perfectly admissible that a transcription, or any piece of music for what matters, doesn't present itself as a 'score'), the definition seems as general and comprehensive as needed to start the discussion. In his analysis, Davies chooses to apply a restrictive definition of transcription: what departs far enough from the original doesn't count any more as transcription but would fall into the category of the 'arrangement,' the 'variations on,' or the 'homage to.' Expanding this either/or dialectic, Stephen Brew proposes to use an imaginary continuum where a new version of an existing work would inevitable fall:[4]

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1 Stephen Davies, "Transcription, authenticity, and performance," in *Themes In the Philosophy of Music.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 47-59.
2 *Ibid,* 49.
3 *Ibid*, 50.
4 Stephen Brew*, Jazz standards arranged for classical guitar in the style of Art Tatum*, diss., Indiana University, 2018.

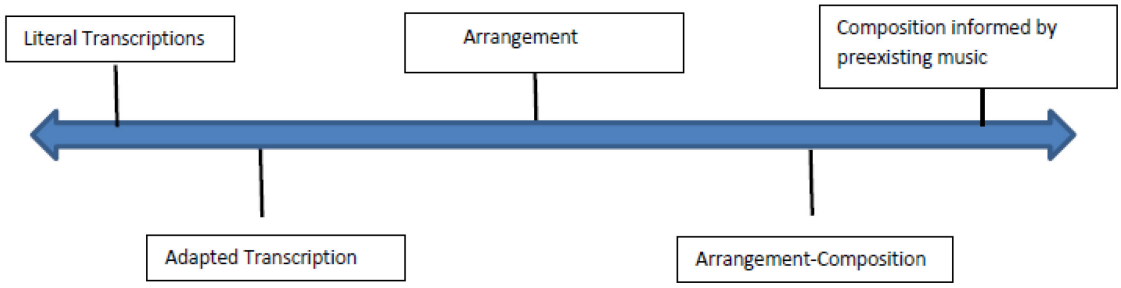


Figure 1: Arrangement continuum, by Stephen Brew

Brew posits that seeing these categories as placed along a continuum would help avoiding the problems of uncompromising classifications. To make things clear: a guitar arrangement of a *vihuela* piece (which often doesn't show any difference in the transcribed score from the original) or a piano version of a harpsichord piece by J.S. Bach would fall at the far left of the proposed continuum. A freely composed fantasy on a theme, or the incorporation of a pre-existing melody on a new composition would place itself at the far right (a good example could be Liszt's Paraphrase on Verdi's *Rigoletto*). As Davies says: "each of these works acknowledges the source of its musical inspiration [unless it's a hidden homage, ed.] but goes on to recompose and decompose the musical content of its source."[5] In between, every shade is virtually possible making it sometimes hard to discriminate where a new version of a work would fall: is it a transcription with heavy adjustments to fit the new medium, or rather an arrangement? The answer doesn't need to be univocal, but it can be safely stated that the more a new version departs from the original in the parameters of pitches and rhythmic values, the more it would fall into the category of the 'arrangement' rather than literal transcription. Therefore, all versions proposed in the second part of this research would count as 'transcriptions,' some more literal,

5 Davies, *Transcription, authenticity, and performance,* 50.

some less. On the other side, the example with which this research started, the *Cancion del emperador* by Narvaez, could be defined as an arrangement.

What is sure from these premises is that a transcription cannot be a mere *copy* of the original. "Some aspects of the original must be altered in the transcription."[6] Even in the more straightforward examples given above, the *vihuela*/guitar or the harpsichord/piano transcriptions, the alterations are more consistent than those immediately visible on the score. By simply being played on two different instruments, the two versions would imply different performing actions, different articulation, and result in a wholly different soundscape. It is therefore possible to say that "a change from one musical medium to another cannot be achieved mechanically or even automatically by the specification of a change in instrumentation,"[7] not even when the notes played are exactly the same as the original.

2.2 Reasons for Transcribing

One may wonder why there would be the need of transcribing a piece designed for a specific instrument. That such need is not specious is proved by the simple fact that many composers went back to their own compositions and elaborated new versions for other instruments or groups of instruments. Famous instances abound, from orchestration of piano pieces to, even more common, piano versions taken from orchestral originals. If we need to admit this practice as legitimate, we should still inquire why such a need emerges. Stephen Davies proposes four ways transcriptions are to be of interest to us, which are also four reasons of their existence, to which I would propose to add a fifth one.

6 *Ibid,* 48.
7 *Ibid,* 49.

1) Transcriptions may have a pedagogical use. From the oldest sources available to us, we know that examples from great repertoire were used to teach students by providing them admirable models. Bach used to re-arrange works of his contemporaries in order to provide study pieces for his sons, and this has also been done by many other composers. The same could be said of excerpts of classical repertoire reduced for piano and used for teaching music theory. Even in more recent times, there are countless examples of simplified versions of famous works (of the classical era or even of pop songs) with pedagogical purpose. In some exceptional cases, the pedagogical function doesn't go through a simplification of the original case: Godowsky's arrangements of Chopin's studies for piano are worked in the direction or an even denser and transcendental language (therefore, they will fit better under n. 3, see below).

2) A fundamental function of transcriptions, especially in the past, was to make pieces of music more readily available than they would have been in the original form. This is true especially of works that required big forces to be performed, such as symphonies and operas. For the latter, vocal scores were the most marketable versions for publishers, since just having a piano available one could listen the favorite arias of any opera. Symphonies were often transcribed for four hands piano, and composers often re-worked their pieces for the forces that were available to them at a given point.

3) A transcription can show us the ability of the transcriber (composer or performer). Two examples will clarify this motivation for re-writing a piece for a new medium. Anton Webern's transcription of the six voices fugue from the Musical Offering by J.S. Bach for chamber orchestra is a stunning example of a subtle use of the modern orchestra to completely transform a baroque piece: it becomes a work of Webern as much as Bach,

although notes are not altered. On the other hand, the groundbreaking version for solo guitar of the Symphony no. 9 (*'New World'*) by Antonin Dvořák performed by the Japanese guitarist Kazuhito Yamashita is hardly a transcription that would find its main motivation in the second point above: it is more a display of the guitarist's unique abilities in reproducing complex orchestral passages on a single instrument.

4) The final reason for valuing transcriptions, according to Davies, is probably the most meaningful to us in purely musical terms: "because a transcription is more than a mere copy of its model, it reflects on its model through the way it re-presents its model."[8] Therefore, a transcription is also a sort of comment on the original work that can expand its meaning and even increase its value. This is at the bottom of the constant fascination that we feel for transcriptions to these days, despite the fact that technological means (i.e. mechanical reproduction of music) made reason n. 2 out of date.

Each well done transcription is meaningful to us for a combination of the above reasons, which ultimately represent also the reasons why transcriptions were created. I would add a fifth one, that is especially valid for transcriptions for classical guitar:

5) Guitarists have looked to transcriptions in order to expand their repertoire with famous pieces by recognized composers. As Brew writes, "the repertoire in the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods did not yield a substantial body of serious concert works. […] As such, it is not surprising that guitarists look to transcription and arrangement to enhance their repertoire."[9]

8 *Ibid*, 51.
9 Brew, *Jazz standards arranged for classical guitar in the style of Art Tatum*, 2.

This fifth point will be clarified and expanded with a short digression on the historical emergence of the practice of the transcription for the classical guitar.

2.3 A History of Transcription for Classical Guitar.

In the Renaissance and early Baroque Eras, few instruments had the prestige of the lute and *vihuela* (this latter confined to Spain). Music of the highest complexity was written for both instruments until they slowly fell out of fashion. Modern guitarists have always liked to see these two instruments as direct antecedents of their own, intentionally forgetting that the guitar was always present alongside the lute and the *vihuela*, first as a four-course, then as a five-course instrument. The repertoire played by early guitar was not as high as the nobler plucked instruments: it served mainly as accompaniments to songs, revealing its popular origins. In fact, the first published manuals or collections of music dedicated to an instrument explicitly named "guitar" (*guitarra, chitarra, guitare*), are tutors that use the *alfabeto* system: a very simple way of notating chords and rhythms in order to accompany songs or other instruments. It's understandable that later guitarists tried to deny these antecedents and looked back at the lute and *vihuela* repertoire. Well before the early music movement[10], guitarists appropriated that repertoire (at least the small part of it that was available in few modern editions) and performed that without too much historical research. To our knowledge, Napoleon Coste (1805-1883) was the very first guitarist who went back to the *vihuela* pieces and elaborated the first versions of them for classical guitar. Some decades later, Francisco Tarrega (1852-1909) regarded as the father of the modern guitar, expanded this idea more than anyone else before. It's true that before him nearly every guitarist had written variations on opera arias. The case of Fernando Sor (1778-

10 With 'Early music movement' it is often defined the broad cultural movement that led (starting in the '60s of the 20th century) to a rediscover of early music under the light of authenticity.

1839) stands out. Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829) wrote potpourris on famous themes, and Johann Kaspar Mertz (1806-1856) composed guitar versions of romantic lieder, but Tarrega felt the need of writing exact guitar transpositions of (mainly) piano pieces by famous composers. This innovation is the fruit of the seclusion that the guitar had been suffering through much of the Classic and the Romantic Eras: never considered by first rank composers, outpowered by the Romantic orchestra or the grand piano, it was mainly relying on repertoire written by its main virtuosos. The reasons for this disfavor by major composers are well known now (one should just think of the infamous paragraph dedicated to the guitar by Berlioz in his *Traitee d'orchestration*[11] –and Berlioz was a guitarist!), but here I shall just focus on the consequences it had on the creation of the first transcriptions by Tarrega. We know that Tarrega, who was a guitarist who had formal musical training, was well aware of the music around him, and had personal connections with some of the leading figures of Spanish music (like Albeniz and Granados). Being familiar with the music of his contemporaries, and the great piano classics of the past (from Beethoven to Chopin to Schumann), he knew that he could not complete the revolution that he had in mind for his instrument without addressing the problem of the repertoire. At this time, most of the guitar concerts were made up of pieces composed by the guitarists themselves: mainly short idiomatic pieces or variations (fantasies, or potpourris) based on popular or opera themes. Tarrega was the first guitarist who wrote a consistent *corpus* of transcriptions and arrangements, having in mind the prestige of the composers to add to his programs. Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Mendelssohn, and even Wagner, among others, are composers that he transcribed for guitar. Since Tarrega, every major figure of guitar history is credited with few or many transcriptions, aimed at expanding the guitar's repertoire while at the

11"One cannot compose for the guitar well unless one is a guitarist." Hector Berlioz, Charles-Marie Widor, *Traité D'instrumentation Et D'orchestration.* (Westmead, Eng.: Gregg, 1970), 86.

same time trying to add pieces of well-known composers to balance the obscurity of much of the repertoire for guitar. This is especially true for Andres Segovia (1893-1987) who was very aware of his pivotal role in the history of the guitar. Because of this, he was able to use his exceptional abilities to change the history of his instrument. For decades, Segovia's concert programs used to follow the same pattern: an opening with a *vihuela* piece (freely transcribed from the old tablature), one or more Baroque pieces often arbitrarily arranged to form a *suite* (mostly Bach, and less frequently Haendel or De Visée), moving to original pieces from the Classic Era (almost inevitably Fernando Sor), and then closing with pieces written for him by his favorite composers. This pattern was taken so seriously that Segovia, aware of the scarcity of baroque pieces easily available (or not satisfied with their quality), even asked Manuel Maria Ponce (1882-1948) to compose pieces 'in the style of', like the one attributed to the (then obscure) German lutenist Sylvius Leopold Weiss. Obviously, such a practice would be unacceptable today, but those were other times, and it is indeed true that much of the Baroque repertoire was not readily available at the beginning of the 20th century. A key moment in the history of the guitar in the 20th century is Segovia's 1924 debut in Paris, when he programmed Bach's *Chaconne* from the Partita BWV 1004. This long and complex work found a new expressivity in the rich palette of the Spanish virtuoso to rave reviews. In a way, it marked an exit of the instrument's insulation by opening new spaces thanks to this new acquired prestige. Segovia approached the piece very freely, inspired also by the famous arrangement that Busoni made for the piano. The result is a piece that blends Bach's architectures with a romantic aesthetic and a surprisingly idiomatic adaptation. This transcription also marked a new stage in the relationship between Bach and the guitar which is so important in the formation of the repertoire that it will be discussed separately.

2.4 Bach and the Guitar

The music of Johann Sebastian Bach has long become a stable part of the guitar repertoire since it is regularly programmed in concerts, figures in every academy's program of study, and is frequently heard in competitions. It goes without saying that Bach never wrote for guitar. While there was a baroque guitar, it was not very much used in Germany, not even as a continuo instrument, as it was in other European countries. If it's legitimate to claim that Tarrega was the first guitarist to transcribe Bach's music (following the Bach renaissance that started with Mendelssohn and continued through the Romantic period after decades of nearly total oblivion), it is interesting to notice the choices of pieces: Tarrega transcribed two *Bourrees* from the cello suites (one of which was incorrectly named *Loure*), the fugue from the first violin sonata (BWV 1001), and the choir of the *Crucifixus* from the B minor mass. He also wrote a study on the *gigue* BWV 825.[12] The list is of utmost interest because it shows us how Bach's works for cello and violin were immediately considered suitable for guitar, while the transcription of a choral work shows an aesthetic far from our current time. Both Segovia and Barrios (his work being practically confined to South America) added several new pieces to the list, drawing again from the works for violin and cello, but also exploring the so-called 'lute' works by Johann Sebastian Bach. The question whether Bach ever composed for the lute is still open and will probably never have a final answer while its implications are beyond the scope of this work. It is enough to know that the myth of the 'lute' works began at the end of the 19th-beginning of the 20th centuries for a series of misinterpretations by German scholars and musicologists, who were working on new complete editions of the works by J.S. Bach. Some of these works (which in any case are not part of an organic group like the violin sonatas and

12 Walter Aaron Clark, *Francisco Tarrega and the Art of Guitar Transcription*, online at http://www.ilams.org.uk/media/walter-clark-tarrega-guitar-transcription.pdf, last access January 2018.

partitas or the cello suites)[13] are actually hardly playable on the lute without extensive rearrangements, including the revoicing and change of keys. Furthermore, three of them are arrangements of earlier works by Bach (namely BWV 1011 for cello, BWV 1006 and the Fugue from BWV 1001 for solo violin) of which one (BWV 1000) was surely not transcribed by Bach himself.[14] What follows is that the so called 'lute' works should not have a priority on other works when we consider Bach's music played on guitar, and in fact both Segovia and Tarrega privileged Violin and Cello works. In recent years, guitarists have shifted their taste and favored mainly works with catalogue numbers from 995 to 1000. Of course, these are still beautiful pieces of music, which if adequately interpreted, can have a great effect on the guitar, but I posit that there is not an ontological reason to prefer them over other pieces by the *Kantor*. As mentioned above, Segovia's transcription of the famous *chaconne* was a landmark in the history of the guitar in the 20th century. After that, many more pieces were transcribed by Segovia, his disciples, and other guitarists to the point that the most commonly played pieces now have several (sometimes radically different) editions. One of the most prolific transcribers, Stanley Yates, has reflected a lot on what it means to transcribe Bach's works for guitar, writing theoretical essays along with a special interest on the cello suites. He correctly emphasizes the abstract process that should guide a transcription which should start with a comprehensive analysis of the harmony and the (often implied) polyphony of the piece.[15] All guitarists know

13 Tilman Hoppstock's extensive research on the 'lute' pieces is an extremely valuable resource for every guitarist who wants to approach these works, but its assumption that "Although the lute plays a quantitatively minor role in the oeuvre of Johann Sebastian Bach, the instrument appears to have occupied him at repeated intervals over a period of more than 30 years." (Tilman Hoppstock, *Bach's Lute Works From the Guitarist's Perspective* (Darmstadt: Prim-Musikverlag 2010), vol. 1 p. 10) doesn't seem supported by any definitive evidence.
14 Clive Titmus, *The Myth of Bach's Lute Suites*, available online at https://www.thisisclassicalguitar.com/bachs-lute-suites-clive-titmuss/ last access January 2018.
15 Stanley Yates, "Bach's Unaccompanied String Music: A New (Old) Approach to Stylistic and Idiomatic Arrangement for the Guitar." *Classical Guitar Magazine* 17, no. 3 (Nov. 1998): 24-29; 17, no. 4, (Dec. 1998): 20-22; 17, no. 5 (Jan.1999): 20-26; 17, no. 6 (Feb. 1999): 32, 34-35.

that the music of Johann Sebastian Bach represents an ineluctable force and many more experiments have been tried through the past decades, either by scholars or by famous performers. The following list tries to synthetize some of the pieces (or family of pieces) commonly played on guitar:

1) The so called 'lute works': the groups of pieces catalogued as BWV995 to BWV1000;
2) The sonatas and partitas for solo violin, BWV1001 to BWV1006;
3) The cello suites, BWV1007 to BWV1012.

Alongside these important families of works, additional pieces have received the attention of performers:

1) Flute partita BWV 1013;
2) Partitas for keyboard, especially BWV 825 in Bb major;
3) Other keyboard works, such as the ambitious transcription of the Goldberg variations by Eotvos, or the Fantasia Cromatica e Fuga by Jorge Caballero;
4) Works for accompanied strings: violin and harpsichord (BWV 1014-1019), viola da gamba and harpsichord (BWV 1027-1029);
5) Arrangements of spare pieces like chorales, arias, single movements from larger works.

The latter group belongs more decidedly to the definition of 'arrangement' rather than 'transcriptions': they are often simple reductions of famous themes converted to pieces for all occasions and sporadically played in concert context (if not as encores).

In conclusion, guitarists have now a wide choice when it comes to play the music of Bach, a choice that was impossible to conceive when Tarrega and Segovia worked their first arrangements.

Segovia wrote multiple arrangements and transcriptions of works by many composers, privileging with few exceptions the big names of the history of piano literature. His transcriptions are of special value to us because they represent a special reading of each of these works by the Spanish Maestro. They are, using the equivalence that Davies proposes, *interpretations* in that they offer a personal view on a given work. In some cases, their interest for us resides precisely in their informative value about Segovia's style and aesthetics more than in the pieces themselves. Segovia also worked out many arrangements of popular tunes from different regions that were largely found in his archives and now published. These follow a long tradition of guitar arrangements of folk tunes that goes back to the origins of the instrument and has one of its highest achievements in the collection of *Catalan Songs* arranged by Miguel Llobet (1878-1939). Segovia's contribution to the original repertoire for guitar, with literally hundreds of commissioned pieces, was so generous that the generation of his students mainly relied on that: the most substantial contribution to the repertoire after Segovia came mainly from guitarists who were out of his sphere of influence. What both Segovia's disciples and other guitarists never stopped to do was to transcribe and arrange new pieces. Just to give some notable examples, John Williams and Julian Bream together played arrangements of famous pieces (such as Brahms *Sextet* op. 18, or Debussy *Claire de lune* from the *Suite Bergamasque*). At the same time, many old transcriptions were being revised or completely reworked so that current guitarists have multiple options when it comes to works of composers like Bach or

Albeniz. Meanwhile, transcriptions became more and more ambitious: Japanese guitarist Kazuhito Yamashita transcribed entire complex orchestral pieces like Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* or Dvorak's Symphony no. 9, and Eliot Fisk embarked in many challenging pieces with notable results, such his many Scarlatti's *Sonatas* and contemporary pieces.

Following the other trends of arranging music, more and more adaptations of folk music began to be produced: some of the most outstanding results are the multiple arrangements of Venezuelan folk tunes and dances by Alirio Diaz, legendary interpreter of that music. Alongside folk repertoire, classical guitarists started to consider also new mainstream repertoires: Jazz arrangements on classical guitar became more and more common, while a composer who was not a guitarist himself, Toru Takemitsu (1930-1996), felt confident enough with the instrument to rework some famous songs by the British rock band The Beatles, in a personal highly refined setting. That opened the way for some of the most relevant contributions of recent times: many of the most played modern transcriptions are fruit of the tireless work by Roland Dyens (1955-2016). Dyens approached a wide range of repertoires: from Brazilian music to Argentine tango and from Jazz standards to classical music. His vivid imagination produced very idiomatic and somewhat free transcriptions (which in many cases would be correctly labeled as 'arrangements'), either for solo guitar or guitar ensembles. This proves that even in recent years, the noble tradition of transcription has not faded, and it now comprehends every music genre and age. In many cases it seems that the art of transcription allows each performer to create a sort of niche that would define his or her personality and style. This way, pieces of music find new life and new forms of expression while continuing to enrich the repertoire of the versatile guitar.

2.5 The Technique of Transcription.

It is time to see the problems and the challenges that every transcriber faces when it comes to re-arrange an existing piece of music. The pre-condition of every attempt of transcription is the perfect knowledge of the technical characteristics (and limitations) of the destination instrument. In the case of the guitar, this means a complete awareness of the fretboard, of the individual technique of left and right hand, and of the peculiarities of its writing. A different set of expertise is required when it comes to evaluate the original piece with its musical and technical demands. One should always ask if an arrangement would contribute to the literature of the guitar by keeping the spirit or at least some of the characteristics of the original version. This implies a pre-evaluation that should even precede the act of transcribing which is an act that varies a lot according to the instrument the original piece is written for. As seen in the previous section, there are guitar transcriptions or arrangements of virtually any repertoire of Western music, from Renaissance to Romantic, from Folk to Classic, from Pop to Contemporary. Also, transcription has been made from the literature of any instrument or even group of instruments, from the most closely related to guitar (like the *vihuela*) to the re-writing of entire orchestral pieces. Every arrangement poses its challenges to guitarists, but the three cases proposed here below are transcriptions of pieces for instruments that have traditionally been sources for expanding guitar repertoire: keyboard instruments (namely, piano and harpsichord), and bowed strings (violin). As anticipated, this finds its justification in the double nature of the guitar, well known by guitarists and composers as well: that of being both an instrument of great melodic capability and one with wide harmonic possibilities. The resulting polyphonic nature was inherited by the great tradition of the lute and the *vihuela* that, despite the technical difficulties, were praised exactly for that reason. The piano, as well as other keyboard

instruments, shares this nature (obviously, with wider harmonic and polyphonic possibilities) while bowed string instruments have an obvious stronger tendency towards melody. A first conclusion can be drawn from this very premise about the nature of the guitar as compared to other instruments: a potential candidate for a transcription would be a keyboard piece with only limited harmonic or counterpoint demands, or a piece for a bowed string instrument that contains also indications on the appropriate harmonization of the melody. As noted above, almost all of the repertoire for bowed string instruments that is currently played on guitar consists of J.S. Bach's works for solo strings. I suggested that this is due to the prestige of the composer, a quality highly valued by guitarists in need of new and important repertoire. The reason is also technical: Bach's works are pieces that stretch the nature of the instruments in a direction that is favorable to the guitar, allowing a very natural translation.

Next I will examine the technical issues of transcribing from piano (but more generally from keyboard instruments) and violin (as the example of a bowed string instrument pertinent to this research) more in detail.

Chapter 3: The Technique of Transcription

3.1 Piano Transcriptions

As we have seen in the historical survey, piano pieces have been the most consistent source of transcriptions for the guitar, starting with the Romantic period. Besides the aesthetical reasons for this choice (mainly the general prestige of piano repertoire), there is also a technical reason, which resides in the comparable nature of the instrument. Naturally, piano and guitar are very different in writing, texture, and capabilities. As a general rule, Richard Yates points out that, "pieces that rely on a pianist's luxury of playing rapid passages with each hand simultaneously, or that comprise dense counterpoint are unlikely candidates." [1] As piano pieces get more and more idiomatic and writing becomes more virtuosic, arrangements of pieces on solo guitar tend to become harder and harder, due to several problems regarding the difference between the two instruments. I will analyze some of the issues of transcribing for piano, attempting to see what piano pieces might be suitable for a guitar transcription.

1) The key

Since the adoption of equal temperament on keyboard instruments, it's safe to say that any key is virtually equal to the other. This allowed some of the great achievements of the keyboard literature, the great collections of pieces in "all the keys," including the two books of the preludes and fugues in all major and minor keys of the *Wohltemperierte Klavier* by J.S. Bach,[2] and the preludes by Chopin.

The guitar is far from this versatility. The most suitable keys are those which enable the performers to take advantage of open strings, in order to make positions less awkward. This

1 Yates, *The Transcriber's Art*, 26.
2 Whether or not this collection is using the equal temperament or another solution, an issue much debated, is not of concern for the present research.

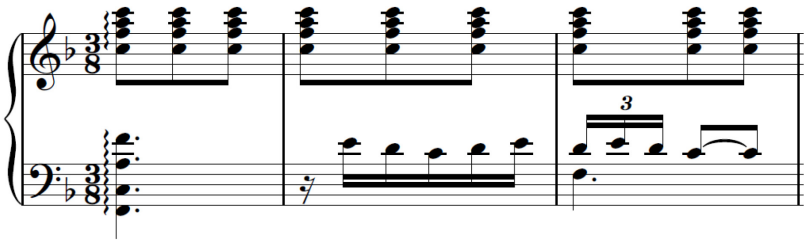
doesn't mean that there are not guitar pieces that explore more remote keys. Locally, modulation to keys with many sharps or flats are very common, but occasionally it's also possible to find entire pieces in unusual keys. Among the first composers who stretched the boundaries of traditional keys, Luigi Legnani (1790-1877) composed 36 *Caprices, op. 20* (modeled after Paganini) in all major and minor keys. Manuel Maria Ponce conceived 24 preludes in all keys (here the model is certainly Chopin) of which Segovia edited 12. Also in the 20th century, a notable collection with an obvious reference to Bach is *Les guitares bien temperée*, by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. In this latter case, the challenge is certainly made more approachable by writing for guitar duo instead of solo guitar.

With very few exception, the tonal repertoire for classical guitar (Classic and Romantic periods) is typically confined into a handful of keys: to the sharp side, it rarely goes beyond the four sharps (E major being still a pretty common key for the presence of E and B as open strings in the standard tuning) while the flat side is even less represented (E flat major and its relative are easily found). When we talk of transcriptions, this means that piano pieces are commonly transposed to the keys that work better on guitar. The need of such an operation is obvious when it comes to passages where, for example, pedal points are held consistently through a passage. One of the most famous guitar transcriptions, *Asturias*, moves a piece originally in G minor to E minor. G minor is not a bad guitar key *per se,* but the ostinato on D would force to have it on a fretted note instead of the beautifully natural B on the second open string. This also allows to have it doubled at the octave with the high B on the seventh fret of the first string (a solution hardly possible with D). Segovia adds the stroke of genius of adding the triplets and making the entire writing incredibly smooth.

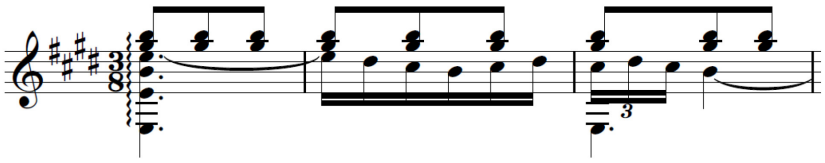
This example from *Asturias* allows another consideration besides the one about key: that of register.

2) Register

A modern piano has a much wider range than that of the guitar (which typically reaches 3 octaves and a fifth). Although more limited than the modern grand piano, even older keyboard instruments always had more extension than a guitar. The organ is an even more extreme case, being the musical instrument with the widest range. This implies that any transcription from a keyboard instrument would need to operate some adjustments when it comes to range. Sometimes it will be an obvious minor adjustment (like cutting octave doublings, so common in piano accompaniment, and limiting the range, see ex. 3 and 4), but other times, it would require a more radical intervention.



Example 3: Isaac Albeniz, *Granada*, mm. 1-3

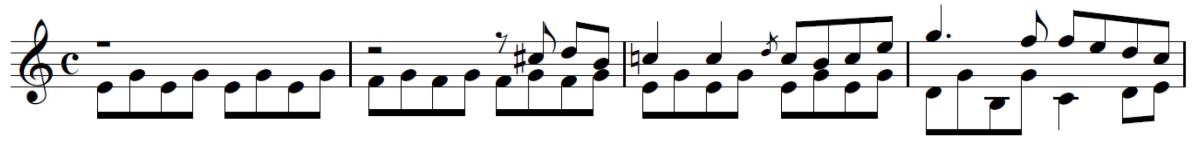


Example 4: Isaac Albeniz, *Granada*, guitar transcription, mm. 1-3

3) Writing

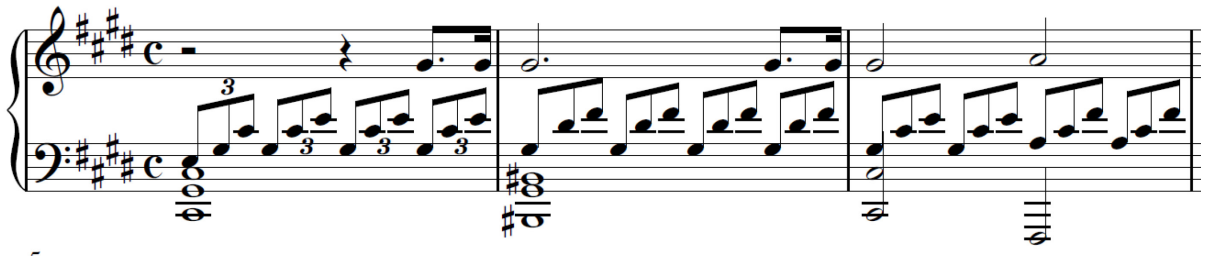
Obviously, guitar and piano differ a great deal when it comes to their writing. This is evident by the mere fact that piano is normally notated on two staves (treble and bass clef) while

guitar typically only uses the treble clef on a single staff. This reflects the difference in range and how music written for piano can be denser and richer in voices than that written for guitar. A lot of piano music of the Classic and Romantic eras gives each hand a very specific role: left for accompaniment, right for melody. This distinction is very trivial, but it's interesting to see how much of the Classic and Romantic guitar literatures reflect this peculiarity of piano writing, offering admirable solutions for what is a technical challenge.

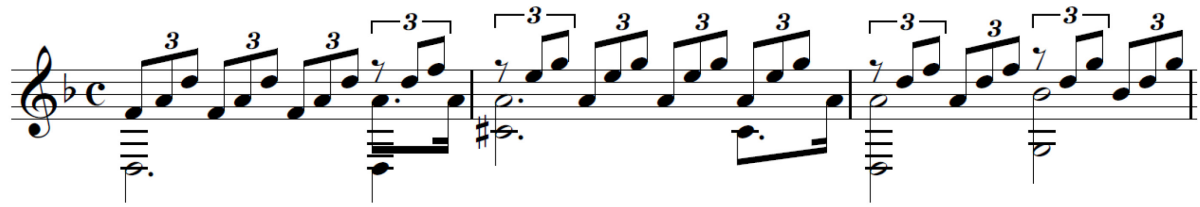


Example 5: Mauro Giuliani, *Sonata, op. 15*, I, mm.1-4

The excerpt from Giuliani's sonata in ex. 5 proves that the typical piano pattern (melody + accompaniment) is not impossible to replicate on guitar *per se*. It just needs to be very simple in its original version so that both hands are still present in the transcription. A famous example of such a writing with a guitar version of it is the opening of the *Moonlight* sonata by L. v. Beethoven (ex. 6 and 7).

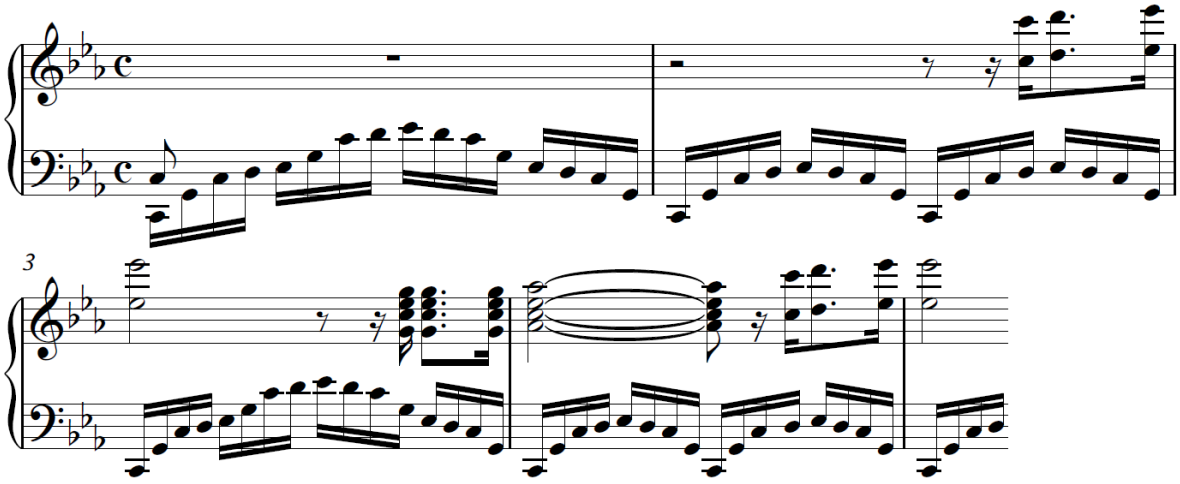


Example 6: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Sonata op. 27 no. 2,* I, mm. 1-3



Example 7: Ludwig van Beethoven*, Sonata op. 27 no. 2, I,* guitar transcription by Francisco Tarrega, mm. 1-3

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the opening of the *revolutionary study* by Chopin (ex. 8) works on the same principle, but it's clearly not replicable on the guitar.



Example 8: Fryderyk Chopin, *Etude op. 10 no. 12*, mm. 10-14

Many other typical features of piano writing would simply not work on guitar: just as an example, octave scales would keep both the guitarist's hands busy and would thus prevent any other voice from doing anything at all. This is the reason why octave doublings are often simplified.

Piano and harpsichord literatures have proven to be an inexhaustible source for guitar transcriptions, as noted in the historical survey above. The keyboard repertoire is in itself so rich that we cannot talk of one single style. Therefore, a guitarist, before engaging in the process of arranging, should be looking for the characteristic that would make that possible. The very common melody + accompaniment writing theoretically works well on the guitar, but the texture should never be too thick.

3.2 Bowed String Instruments

While in the case of music for keyboard, it can safely be said that guitar transcriptions cover much of the history of music, at least from Frescobaldi to Albeniz and Granados, those from bowed string instrument are much more limited. In fact, out of Johann Sebastian Bach's music, only few other pieces are regularly performed on guitar. Other violin music of the Baroque era is not regularly explored (maybe one exception being the few concertos for violin by Vivaldi that have been arranged for guitar and orchestra), and later repertoire is probably considered more and more idiomatic in a way that doesn't find a good transposition on guitar. It needs to be remarked that Bach's music represents a happy exception in the music written for string instruments: in Stanley Yates' words,

> the violin works are readily accommodated, the notated tessitura is similar, and almost all multi-stops can be comfortably reproduced and sustained. Indeed, in some ways the music is more technically feasible on the guitar than it is on the violin. However, the most important reason for the success of this music when played on the guitar is the polyphonic and textural completeness of the original - very little needs to be changed or added.[3]

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about later repertoire. First, works for solo violin (or cello) are very rare, and Classic and Romantic composers were taking advantage of an accompanying instrument (piano, or sometimes guitar!) in order to emphasize its melodic qualities, a sphere where the characteristics of the guitar cannot compete. Furthermore, the literature often developed toward an intense virtuosity, which makes any arrangement much harder. Nevertheless, there are some important exceptions. The most important has to do with the most influent violinist of all times: Niccolò Paganini. Guitarists are obviously fascinated by this

3 Yates, *Bach's Unaccompanied String Music*, part III, 21.

figure, since Paganini was also a very proficient guitarist. Some of his music for guitar, notably the *Grande Sonate*, is often performed in concert although it typically lacks the strokes of genius that his violin music has. He also often uses the guitar as an accompanying instrument for some shorter and simpler violin works. In recent times, some guitarists turned to Paganini's most influent work, the collection of 24 caprices, his *opus 1.* The reason for such an endeavor has to be found clearly in the ambition of the challenge, but it's true that the *caprices* sometimes challenge the limits of the violin in a way that resonates with the peculiarities of the guitar. Australian guitarist John Williams was the first to frequently play the most famous of the series, no. 24, which is now commonly heard on guitar. Decades later, Eliot Fisk embarked in the unimaginable task of transcribing the whole set. Fisk's extroverted and virtuoso playing certainly obtained an impressive result, although some caprices work technically better than others. Now it's not rare to hear in concert caprices n.1, 5, 9, 17.

After Paganini, for the whole 19th century bowed string literature evolved in a way that made pieces hardly adaptable for guitar. The same goes for the 20th century, which saw a general evolution towards a highly pronounced idiomaticity of the writing. Attempts of transcribing for guitar music written for violin or cello in the past century are rare but very significant. A few of those are again fruit of the tireless work of Eliot Fisk: among other pieces, he transcribed the monumental set of variations based on Paganini op.1 n. 24 by George Rochberg, which was originally for violin and called the *Caprice Variations.* He also transcribed the *Sonata per violino* by Spanish composer Cristobal Hallfter. In recent years, Kostas Tosidis transcribed Ligeti's *Cello Sonata*, among cornerstones of cello solo repertoire, and Tariq Haarb worked on Benjamin Britten's *Cello Suite n.1*. Interestingly enough, while guitar transcriptions from bowed string instruments are historically less abundant than from the piano (with the

exception of Bach's music), it seems that there are many opportunities for trying to adapt music of the 20th century.

I will analyze in detail some of the peculiarities of transcription from bowed strings, using the emblematic case of the violin and exploring some of the problems that the transcriber may find.

1) Key.

Unlike keyboard instruments, the violin has a set of keys that has historically been preferred by composers: similarly to the guitar, the most used keys are those that allow an extended use of open strings, avoid awkward positions, and create less problems of intonation adjustments. Therefore, pieces entirely written in keys with more than three flats or four sharps are less common. As a clarifying example, Paganini's entire set of Caprices, op. 1 never moves out of that range. Since the spectrum of keys most commonly used on the violin matches perfectly with that used on the guitar, described above, it allows in many cases to use the same key (for example, Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin are commonly played on guitar in the original keys).

2) Register.

If we limit our considerations to standard tunings, the violin's range goes from G3 (one third above the lowest note on the guitar, E3), up to approximately E7 (above which notes become hardly playable), obviously extendable by the using of harmonics. The instrument has clearly a much wider extension than guitar on the higher register and that should be taken into consideration when transcribing a piece not only because some of the higher notes might as well not be playable on the guitar but also (and even more importantly) because the violin moves very comfortably in the higher register, in a way

that might be awkward on the guitar. That is true especially for repertoires that push the boundaries of the instruments (like some of the virtuoso romantic repertoire or many avant-garde pieces), while much of the Baroque and Classic music stays into a more restricted range.

3) Writing.

As already mentioned, this is the aspect that historically made it harder for violin pieces to be transcribed to guitar: much of violin repertoire consists of pieces that emphasize the melodic properties of the instrument, or its agility and brilliant qualities. All of this is hardly replicable on the guitar. Furthermore, solo pieces are an extremely small minority of the repertoire (although there are some very significant pieces), and transcribing a piece for violin and piano accompaniment would mean to synthesize in one single instrument a melody (often hard to sustain) and an often-complex harmony[4]. On the other hand, the pieces that proved to work better for guitar are those that explore the polyphonic potential of the violin, which clearly finds a perfect adaptation on guitar. Nevertheless, even those pieces sometimes require a process of adaptation.

Stanley Yates discusses some of the processes of transformation that he used to develop good and idiomatic transcriptions of Bach's Cello suites. Particularly, he discusses the need of adding notes to achieve one of the following results: 1) Adding notes to the lower voices in order to have a consistent bass line, 2) dividing long notes to compensate for the longer sustain achieved with the bow, and 3) adding imitative motion to enrich the texture.[5] It needs to be said

4 One example of this challenging task could be the recent arrangement of F. Schubert's *Arpeggione Sonata* for solo guitar by Angelo Gilardino.
5 Yates, *Bach's Unaccompanied String Music*.

that Bach's cello suites tend to have a thinner texture than the more densely written violin sonatas and partitas (with the obvious example of the three lengthy fugues in the compositions), but the same principles could generally apply to the violin as well. The transcriber should be guided by a good knowledge of the style of the era and of the composer, and by harmonic and contrapuntal considerations. Such a background on which basing a more extensive arrangement of a given work is often lacking for more modern and contemporary pieces, where the individuality of each work makes it very hard to elaborate a plausible language for a heavy intervention. The options left to the transcriber are two: either to adhere to the text with just smaller necessary arrangements, or to creatively intervene on the text in a sort of re-composition.

Chapter 4: Three Transcriptions

The following transcriptions, which will be preceded each by an individual introduction, are a practical consequence of the theoretical/historical framework displayed above.

Each represents an example of the cases explored in the previous chapter, being the three pieces originally written for harpsichord, piano, and violin. In that, each piece falls in a long tradition of transcriptions for the classical guitar. It would be wrong to say that I *chose* the following pieces for this research. Rather, I encountered them in their original form, and their characteristics naturally struck me as very suitable for an adaptation for guitar. While those characteristics will be discussed in the introduction to each edition, I will summarize here what general features made all the pieces presented here of great interest for guitar repertoire:

1) They are three pieces by significant composers of three different ages and styles. One is probably the composer with a longer and nobler tradition of arrangements for solo guitar (Bach). Ysaÿe is known nowadays mainly for his violin works (although his numerous compositions are much more varied than that), and he is considered one of the most significant figures for the instrument at the beginning of the 20th century. Wagner is certainly not known for his piano music: far for this being a problem, I think that a transcription of a movement from one of his more obscure works can shed new light on some lesser known aspects of his development as a composer.

2) Although there have been other attempts to transcribe some of the pieces presented here, those arrangements didn't receive much attention and are not part of the current guitar repertoire.

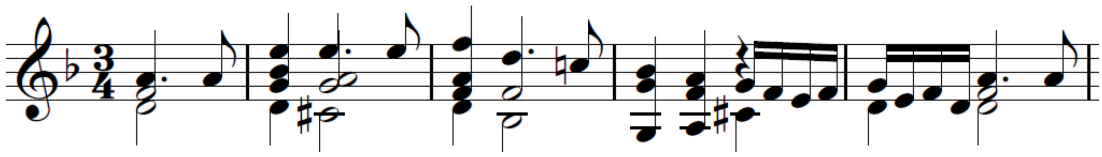
3) The resulting transcriptions maintain a thorough faithfulness to the original texts, and at the same time, they prove to be playable and idiomatic on guitar, despite being all technically very challenging.

Another *caveat* should be mentioned before analyzing each case. The musical content of each piece has been rigorously reproduced in the version for guitar. In other words, with different degrees of adherence to the original, each of the adaptations presented here would represent a case of 'transcription' rather than 'arrangement.' Although these two words may occasionally be used as synonymous, according to the taxonomy presented above, they position themselves on two different areas of a continuum. Each of the three pieces would find the place on the left/far left of the spectrum reproduced in figure 1.

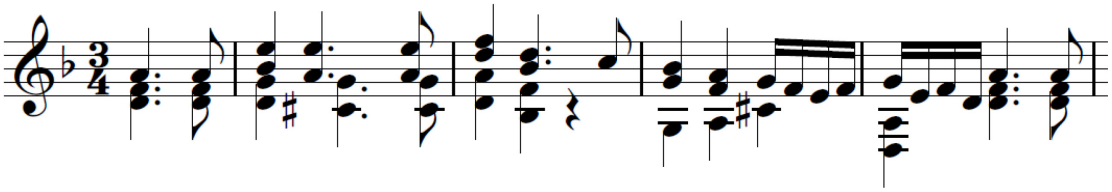
Nevertheless, adaptations were necessary to achieve playability and to preserve the idiomaticity that qualifies a good transcription.

To that end, sometimes voicing has been rearranged and some notes have been taken out altogether (details are discussed below). The scholar or performer who wants to have an exact idea of the original voice leading or chordal voicing should refer himself to one of the reference editions of the edited pieces.

An extreme example of that need comes from one of the most famous and recognized guitar transcriptions: Segovia's version of Bach's *chaconne*. In the guitar edition, the first V-I movement reveals parallel fifths that, of course, are not in Bach's original text. Nevertheless, it allows a nice sounding open chord (and therefore a richer sonority), and a smooth transition (see ex. 9 and 10). The modern performer, going back to the original text, should be able to choose whether to sacrifice the original voice leading in favor of Segovia's version or not.



Example 9: Johann Sebastian Bach, *Chaconne BWV 1004*, mm. 1-4, original voicing.



Example 10: Johann Sebastian Bach, *Chaconne BWV 1004*, mm. 1-4, Segovia's transcription for guitar.

The suggested editions for comparison are indicated in bibliography.

4.1 Johann Sebastian Bach, *Aria Variata alla Maniera Italiana*, BWV 989

The oldest source that contains the variations catalogued as BWV 989 is the so-called *Andreas Buch* that contains works of J.S. Bach alongside several contemporary composers.[1] It was compiled by Johann Christoph Bach (d. 1721), Bach's older brother, who is also responsible to the title given to the piece: *Aria. Variata. all Man. Italiana*. The "Man." of the title has been interpreted as "*Manuale*" on other sources, indicating a special Italian harpsichord keyboard, but this sounds like a stretch.[2] Nevertheless, even the reference to a supposed 'Italian style' is not unproblematic: an interpretation could be possible given the likely acquaintance of Bach with Corelli's sets of variations (mainly in his Op. 5) with which BWV 989 shares the different tempo indications through the variations (quite uncommon in German contemporary sets of

1 Robert Hill, Johann Andreas Bach, and Johann Sebastian Bach. *Keyboard Music From the Andreas Bach Book and the Möller Manuscript* (Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Music, Harvard University, 1991).
2 See the critical notes in Bach, Johann Sebastian, Hartwig Eichberg, Thomas Kohlhase, Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Sebastian Bach, et al. *Einzeln überlieferte Klavierwerke II, Und Kompositionen Für Lauteninstrumente.* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1976).

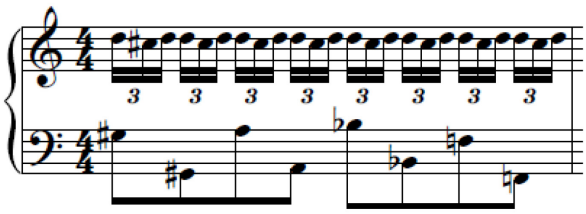
variations).[3] Bach's familiarity with Corelli's Op. 5 is not demonstrated and in any case, it would only make a very weak connection to a certainly hardly identifiable 'Italian style.' Furthermore, the piece has clear connections with models offered by Buxtehude and other German contemporaries. In any case, together with BWV 582, this is the earliest example known to us of a set of variations written by the young Bach. It certainly belongs to the Weimar period, and it was composed before 1713. It uses a secular tune (most likely original) that is presented in ten variations which use the same harmonic structure and often similar melodic gestures. What strikes even in this early attempt is the careful construction that emphasizes the recurring elements of the theme while adding elements of variety: variety in rhythm by adding triplets, syncopations, metric changes, and variety in the harmonic and melodic contour. The return of the theme at the end of the composition (labelled as "Var. X", probably because of the slightly different harmonization) marks a precedent for Bach's most famous set of variations, his *Goldberg Variations, BWV 988.*

Why would this piece make a good guitar transcription? First, it is written mainly in two parts: this thin contrapuntal writing is not unlike some pieces labelled as 'lute works' (see above). A transcription would therefore be less ambitious than the solo guitar adaptation of the *Goldberg variations*, attempted by Josef Eotvos.[4] At the same time, it could have a great historic value, being the transcription of a piece not commonly performed on keyboard (certainly less than Bach's *Partitas* or *Suites* for harpsichord). This does not imply that the task is easy and straightforward. Some changes need to be done in order to make it playable on guitar. The first one concerns the key: while A minor is certainly a key that works on classical guitar, in this case

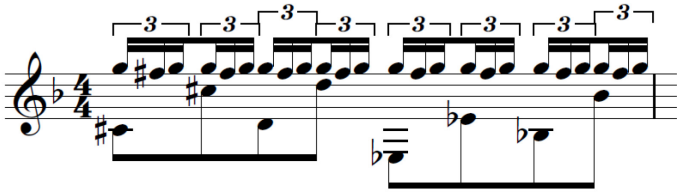
3 Peter Williams, "Some thoughts on Italian elements in certain music of Johann Sebastian Bach", *Recercare*, 11 (1999), pp. 185-200.
4 Johann Sebastian Bach, Josef Eotvos, *Goldberg Variations, BWV 988* (Heidelberg: Chanterelle 1998).

it would require too many changes in the original distribution of voices, as it is visible in the transcription published by Paolo Cherici,[5] which keeps the original key. At the very beginning of the theme, the top voice would need to start on a high range (in order to give enough space to the other voices), instead of the middle range of the original version. D minor would allow a better distribution of voices, and a wider range thanks to the dropping of the sixth string. Below, some of the main editorial changes of the transcription:

1) Range has been compressed in order to accommodate all the voice in the limited range of a guitar. In most cases, this has not produced clashes between the external voices. Thanks to the transposition to D minor, even some octave movements have been preserved (see ex. 11 and 12) which gives more variety to the bass line.



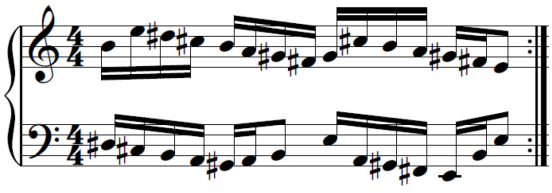
Example 11: J. S. Bach, *Aria Variata,* Var II, m. 7



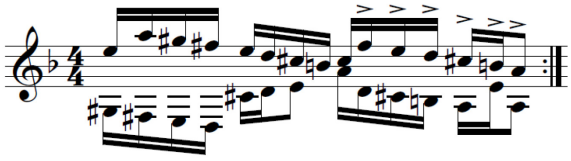
Example 12*:* J. S. Bach, *Aria Variata*, Var II, m. 7, guitar transcription.

2) Occasionally, such a reduction of the range has generated the necessity of octave transposition in order to avoid voices' overlaps (ex. 13 and 14).

5 Johann Sebastian Bach, and Paolo Cherici. *Opere Scelte: Trascritte Per Chitarra* (Milano: Suvini Zerboni, 2007).

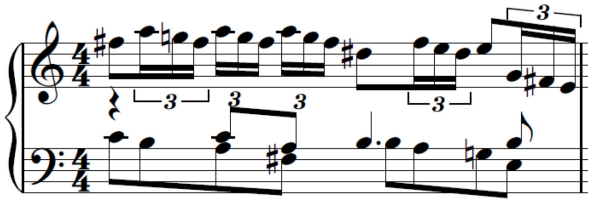


Example 13*:* J. S. Bach, *Aria Variata*, Var IX, m. 6

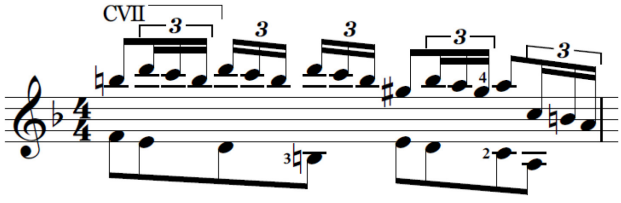


Example 14: J. S. Bach, *Aria Variata,* Var IX, m. 6, guitar transcription.

3) Only occasionally some notes of the original have been removed in order to facilitate playability. These limited simplifications were required when the regular two voices writing is enriched with an extra layer (ex. 15 and 16), or in the more densely written theme, especially in its second occurrence as Var. X.



Example 15*:* J. S. Bach, *Aria Variata,* Var II, m. 3.



Example 16: J. S. Bach, *Aria Variata*, Var II, m. 3, guitar transcription.

A final note should be added for what concerns performance practice. The legitimacy of a guitar transcription of a harpsichord piece by Bach is not of concern here, since, as mentioned above, some of the core pieces of guitar repertoire were actually composed for keyboard

instruments. Historical examples on how Baroque composers adapted pre-existing pieces for new instruments (or new ensembles) are abundant, many by J.S. Bach himself.[6] The problem of such a practice ultimately resides mostly in the idiomaticity of the resulting transcription, which needs not to distort the original text. This piece is extremely demanding on guitar, but its very structure makes the transcription accessible to the instrument. Careful choices (which go beyond the scope of this work) are to be made regarding ornamentation (such as in the heavily ornamented Var. I) or tempo choices, in order not to lose the original agility.

4.2 Richard Wagner, II. Adagio, from *Grosse Sonate in A-dur*

Richard Wagner's piano works "span all five decades of his creative life,"[7] but they are certainly not the most praised or well-known pieces of his output, overshadowed by his great operatic works. Nevertheless, they offer great insights on a more intimate dimension of the composer of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, either by being occasional pieces dedicated to friends, or like the piece presented here, compositional essays of his youth. Wagner wrote his *Grosse Sonate in A-dur* probably between the end of 1831 and the beginning of 1832.[8] It was therefore composed when Wagner was studying under the tutelage of Theodor Weinling (1780-1842), who he later praised as "the greatest living contrapuntist."[9] The *Sonata*, unlike other piano works, is not mentioned in the composer's detailed diaries, but the autograph is still preserved, and it's recorded as *op. 4*. In his review of Wagner's piano works, Charles Timbrell notes that the *Sonate in A-dur* is "more attractive than the Sonata in B-flat Major," and compared to that earlier essay,

6 Theodor Göllner, J.S. Bach and the tradition of keyboard transcriptions, in Robbins Landon, H.C. and R. Chapman, ed., *Studies In Eighteenth-Century Music: A Tribute to Karl Geiringer On His Seventieth Birthday* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), 253-260.
7 Charles W. Timbrell, "Wagner's Piano Music, Part I", American Music Teacher, Vol. 23, No. 5 (1974), 5-9.
8 A discrepancy between the dating proposed by Carl Dalhaus, curator of the edition, and Newman, is not relevant for our purposes here.
9 Timbrell, *Wagner's Piano Music, Part I*, 6.

"all its movements represent a sophisticated compositional advance."[10] The second movement of the sonata is a large elegiac movement in F# minor (therefore in the relative minor key of A major), and it's described by Timbrell as an ABA form, while it would seem more appropriate to be labelled as a Sonata form. The slow movement in a non-tonic minor mode (in this case vi of A major) is not rare in the Classic literature (see Beethoven op. 10 n. 3 or op. 59 n. 1), and it's often to be read as "an antitype to the previously governing key- as the deep- sinking into the gloomy, spectral, grotesque, or funereal underside of the tonic"[11] (the relative minor, retaining the key signature of the work's real tonic). Furthermore, this choice of keys allows the original tonic key (now the median) to be the key of the secondary group, therefore offering potential for a reminiscence of the first movement. In the recapitulation, the second group is re-presented on the Submediant major (D major). This solution, while striking in sound, is actually not rare even in Haydn where VI is often interpreted as a prolonged upper neighbor to an implied dominant.

The tonal space roughly described above creates an intimate and melancholic atmosphere that is emphasized by the elegiac writing, which follows mainly two patterns:

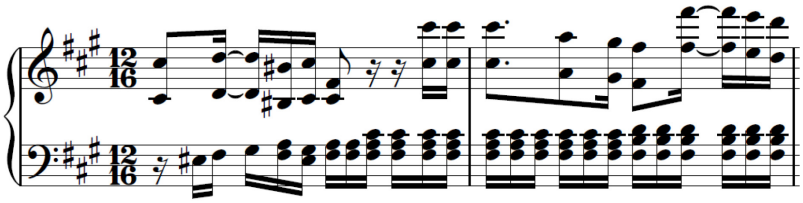
1) A simple minor melody repeated at different octaves and with slightly different harmonization, accompanied by a texture of repeated chords (first thematic group);
2) A melody accompanied by arpeggiating figures (second thematic group).

The second part of the first thematic group is also used as a generating idea for most of the development.

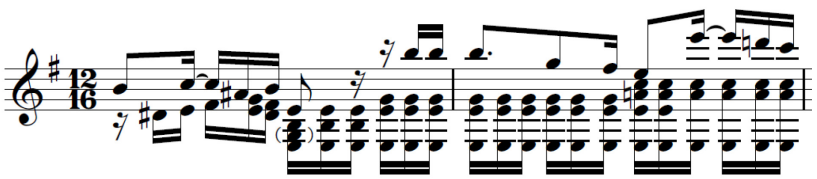
10 *Ibid,* 6.
11 James A Hepokoski, and Warren Darcy. *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations In the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 325.

The thin writing and the two main textures used through the movement (very much used in the guitar's classical repertoire) make the transcription possible and potentially idiomatic. What makes the project attractive is precisely the gloomy atmosphere and the romantic aesthetic that pervades the movement, which is not extraneous to many contemporary and later guitar pieces. The color resources of the guitar could help enhance this general soundscape, emphasizing characters that are already present in the original score. Before moving to the analysis of the editorial choices, it needs to be said that the original key has been moved to E minor, therefore one whole step down. The choice is imposing itself given the recurrence of low pedals on the tonic throughout the piece (F# being practically impossible), and the convenience of having the dominant B on an open string. All the other main transposed key areas (G major and C major) turn out to be very convenient on guitar. Besides transposition, here below are some of the main interventions of the editor:

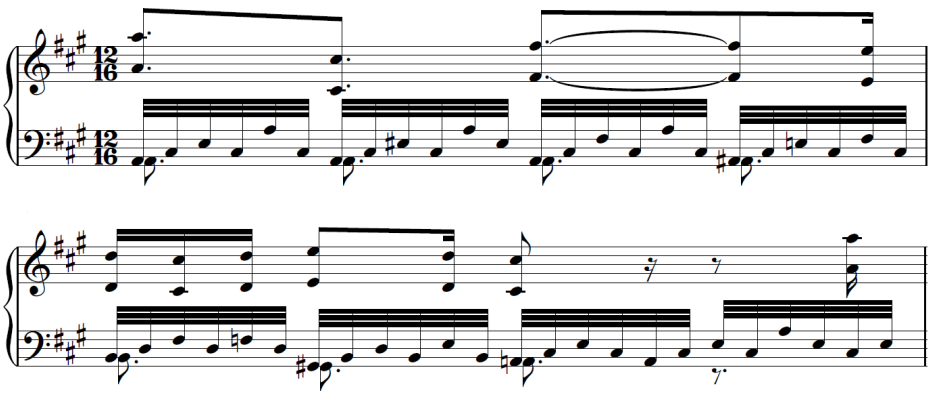
1) Reduction of most of the octave doublings. Melodies or motivic ideas are often doubled in the piano original. These have been for the most cases cut for reasons of playability. (ex. 17, 18, 19, and 20)



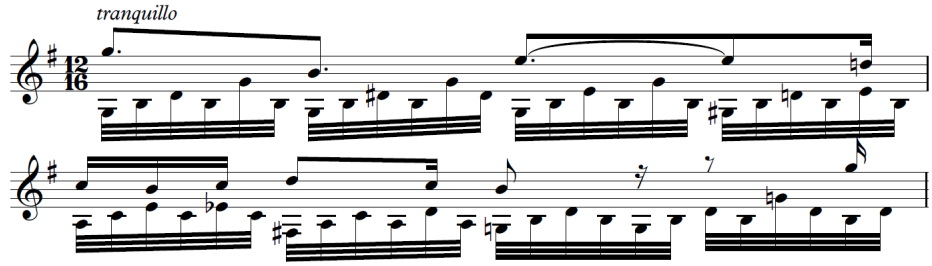
Example 17: R. Wagner, *Adagio molto,* mm. 8-9.



Example 18: R. Wagner, *Adagio molto,* mm. 8-9, guitar transcription.

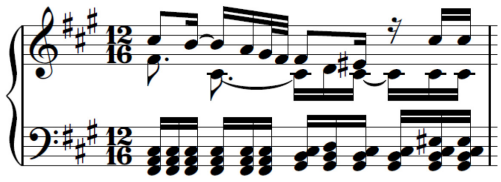


Example 19: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto,* mm. 21-22.

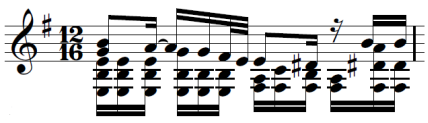


Example 20: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto,* mm. 21-22, guitar transcription.

2) Accompanying chords have been in some cases substantially simplified. When that was necessary, the bass line has been always preserved, and then priority has been given to notes that were crucial either because they defined the mode, provided relevant dissonances, or designed interesting inner melodies. (ex. 21 and 22)

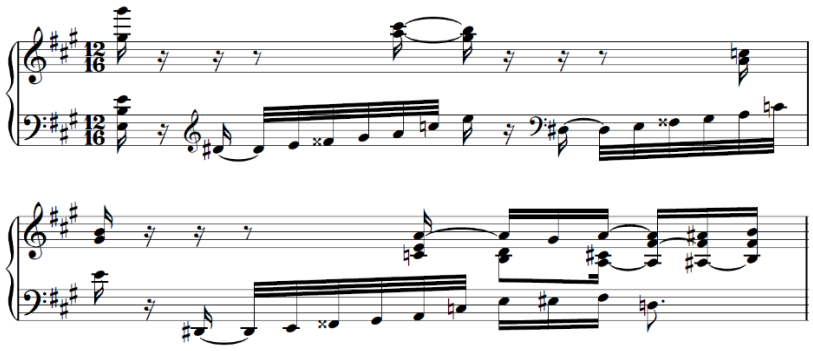


Example 21: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto*, m. 2.

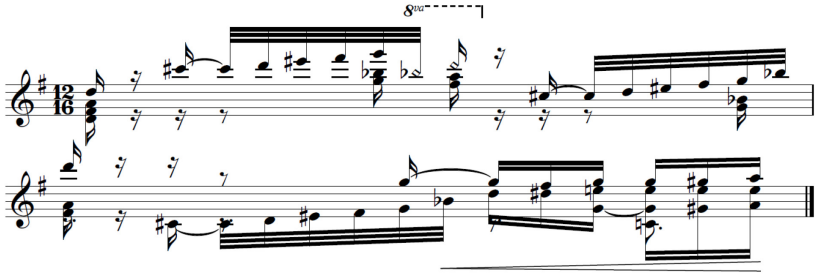


Example 22: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto,* m. 2, guitar transcription.

3) Reorganization of register distribution. The range of the piano allows a phrase to be repeated through different octaves. While this is possible to do on guitar as well, it needs to be carefully planned due to the more limited extension. As an example, see bb. 18-19 (ex. 23 and 24). In the original, the ascending scale starting at D#4 is then repeated one and then two octaves lower (starting at D#3 and D#2). In order to keep the same idea, the very first instance of the scale needed to be on the highest possible register of the guitar (the last two notes being so high to require harmonics). Therefore, the simple accompanying figure is moved below the scale from above it.

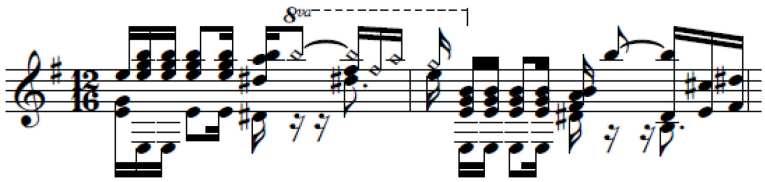


Example 23: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto,* mm. 18-19.



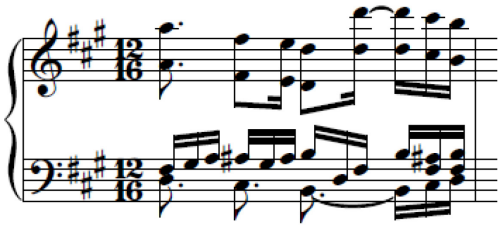
Example 24: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto,* mm. 18-19, guitar transcription.

4) Also related to range, some of the passages that were taking full advantage of the potential of the piano have been in some cases rendered with the use of harmonic sounds which can artificially expand the range of the guitar. This proved to be useful in cases like the one described above or as in Example 25, and it provides an added layer of color to the texture.

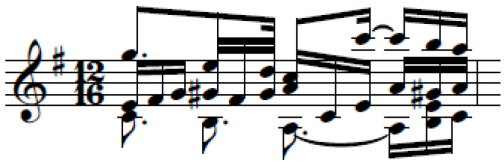


Example 25: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto,* mm. 83-84, guitar transcription.

5) In some cases, notes cannot be sustained on guitar as much as required in the original score. Note ex. 26 and 27. Here by simply removing the octave doubling, every note of the original has its counterpart in the guitar transcription (top voice, inner voice, bass line). The price that has to be paid in order to achieve this complexity is that the lower note A cannot be sustained as much as needed. I preferred to keep the original note values in order to suggest the composer's intention for the performer, who might as well be able to find a new solution or look for alternative choices. Here, as in many other cases, the duration of a note must be *suggested* rather than practically executed.



Example 26: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto,* m. 14.



Example 27: R. Wagner, *Grosse Sonate in A dur, II Adagio molto,* m. 14, guitar transcription.

The adaptation comprehensibly required more intervention compared to the harpsichord piece by J.S. Bach. For the most part, editorial changes were limited to octave transposition of phrases, redistribution of voices, and simplification of chords. However, some passages had to be reimagined in order to prove playable on guitar or simply more effective and sonorous. It would be false to claim that these changes would make it an 'arrangement' instead of a 'transcription': the outline of the text (even in some of its details) has been preserved and the two scores could be easily compared measure-by-measure.

4.3 Eugene Ysaÿe, *Sonate Nr. 1 pour Violon Seul*

Eugene Ysaÿe seems to have sketched out the "Six sonatas" in one single day, after a trip from Brussels to Le Zoute, in 1924.[12] While they most likely were the product of years of meditation, it is true that they are the result of a very coherent and cohesive utterance. They also are an example of a language that evolved from his early works, influenced by Wieniawski and Vieuxtemps, by absorbing the influence of Cesar Frank, Debussy, and the contemporary trends. Above all, the whole set is an explicit homage to the *Six Sonatas and Partitas* by Johann Sebastian Bach that without any doubts is among the highest achievements of the literature for

12 Antoine Ysaÿe, *Historical Account of the Six Sonatas for Unaccompanied Violin Op. 27 of Eugène Ysaÿe: And Chronological Summary of the Major Events In the Master's Life and Career Followed by a Catalogue of His Compositions and a Discography* (Brussels: Editions Ysaÿe, 1968).

solo violin. Ysaÿe was the foremost violinist of the generation following Wieniawski, Kreisler, and Sarasate, and preceding Jasha Heifetz; and he was one of the most acclaimed interpreters of Bach's works. It should not be forgotten that Bach's works for solo violin were long forgotten as concert pieces (with few exceptions some pieces were mainly used as studies in the 19th century), and it is thanks to the action of some great performers that they were gradually introduced to the stages. The entire set of Ysaÿe's Sonatas is thus inconceivable without Bach's model, but there is more than that: the *Second Sonata* notoriously opens with a direct quote from the *Prelude* from the first partita BWV 1006. The *First Sonata* is Bachian in a subtler way, but even from the articulation in movements it clearly adheres to the model of the *Sonata da chiesa* that Bach uses for BWV 1001, 1003, and 1005: four movements with the articulation of tempos slow, fast, slow, fast, and a complex polyphonic movement in second position. In its original key, G minor, it further recalls the first Sonata by the Kantor.

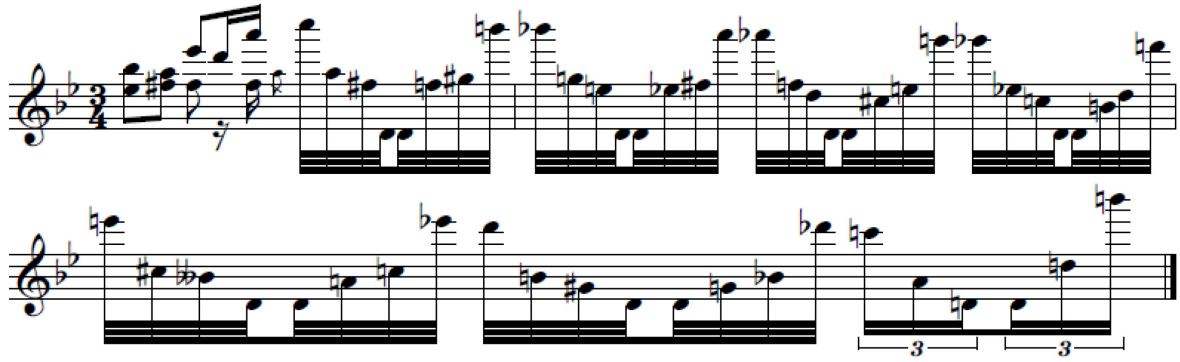
We are given further information about the first sonata: it was dedicated to Joseph Szigeti, whose interpretations of Bach's works are said to have inspired the whole set. An astonishing element of modernity lays in how each Sonata is tailored to the playing style of each dedicatee (Szigeti, Thibaud, Enesco, Kreisler, Crickboom, and Quiroga). Szigeti, after a concert, read the Sonata at first sight in the composer's house, apologizing for the mistakes. Later in 1925, he premiered it in Brussels at the presence of Ysaÿe's good friend Queen Elisabeth of Belgium. In Szigeti's words, the Sonata is a work "that will permit later generations to reconstruct a style of playing of which the Ysaÿe recordings give us barely a hint."[13] In fact, in this sonata like in the others, we see how innovative Ysaÿe's technique probably stood out as the first real innovator after Paganini.

13 Joseph Szigeti, *With Strings Attached* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 117.

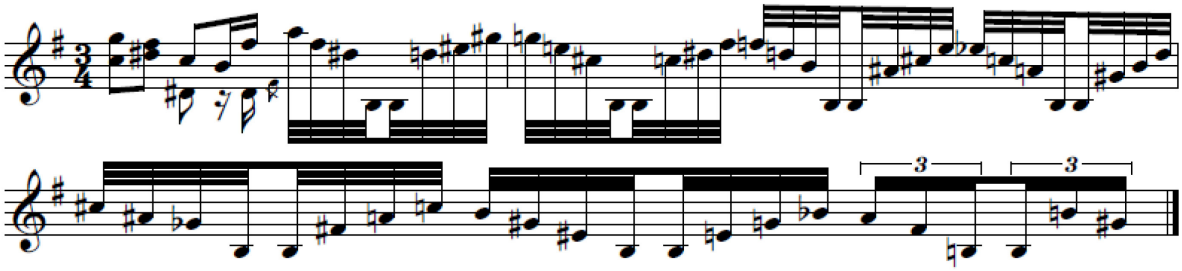
How can an idiomatic and advanced work be transcribed from violin to guitar? There are objective difficulties, especially on passages where the violin technique allows music gestures that are hardly reproducible on the guitar, but all those are mitigated by the nature of this music. This is the same way Bach's works for solo string instruments can find (with some adjustments) a new vest on classical guitar; I would say this Sonata allows and even suggests, an arrangement. The Danish guitarist Bjarne Kristensen attempted to do so by keeping the original key and detuning the fifth and sixth string to, respectively, G and D. I chose to move the original key to E minor, and some examples will show the reason for that choice. As stated in the introduction, G minor would seem a good key for guitar, especially with the double dropping of the tuning of the two lower strings (A to G, E to D), which creates an almost open tuning. Nevertheless, a piece like the Sonata, in its original version, takes full advantage of the whole range of the violin, being a perfect example of a modern, idiomatic piece (much more than the Sonatas by Bach, for example). That means that excursions to the high register are very common, including fast passages or two-voice parts. Obviously, this kind of writing is always problematic on the guitar. Of course, some passages could be altered by revoicing chords or transposing individual lines, but in such a careful constructed polyphonic texture I think these solutions should be used very cautiously. A transposition to E minor allows to better take advantage of the full range of the guitar, especially in the lower register, It also takes all of the pitches a minor third down, limiting awkwardly high passages.

That being clarified, some local adjustments are still necessary to make it fit for the destination instrument, especially in the more overtly idiomatic sections. These are of several kind:

1) Octave transposition of some passages otherwise hardly playable. In the first movement, the arpeggio at m. 29 starts on a pitch that, even considered the transposition to E minor, makes it hard to flow fast, and it limits the sonority of the instrument. Given the space between the lower pedal on B (original: D) and the other three notes of each group in the arpeggio, the solution was to take these three notes one octave down. The result is idiomatic and more sonorous (ex. 28 and 29);

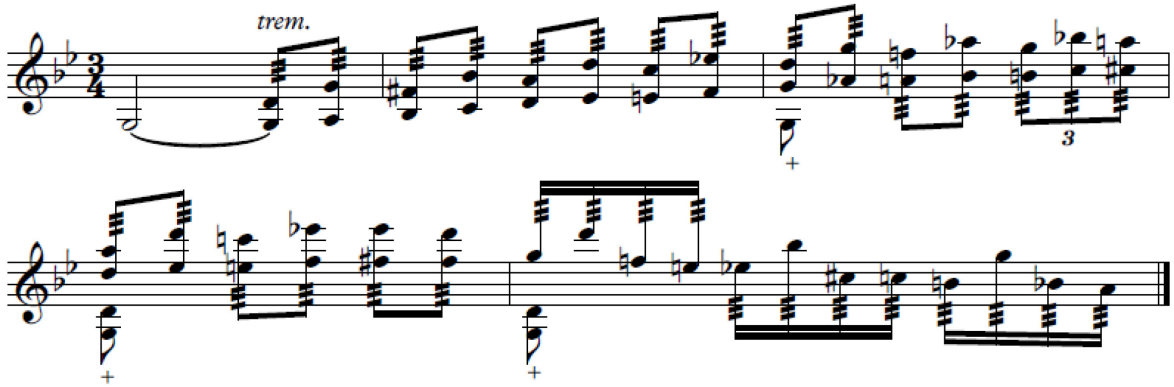


Example 28: E. Ysaÿe, *Sonata no. 1, I. Grave*, mm. 29-31.

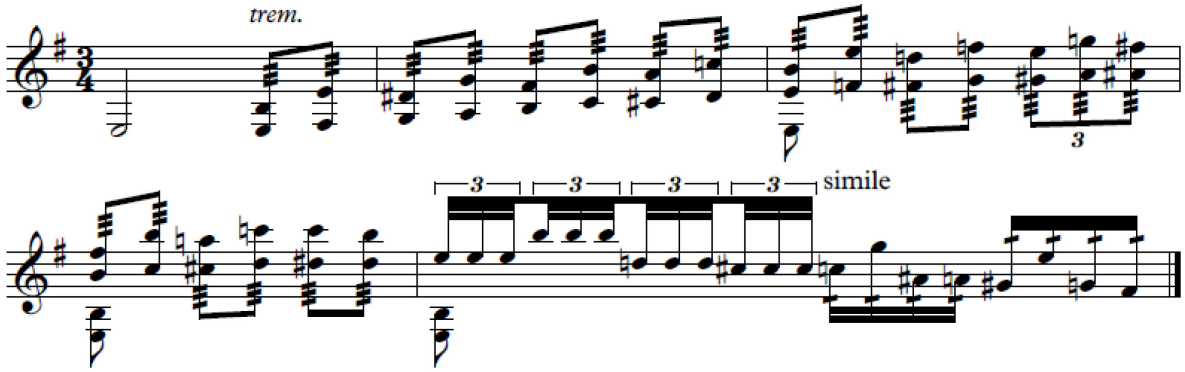


Example 29:E. Ysaÿe, *Sonata no. 1, I. Grave,* mm. 29-31, guitar transcription.

2) The tremolo section of that closes the first movement (ex. 30 and 31) found a very idiomatic transposition on the guitar and remained almost unaltered (Kristensen decides to use the typical guitar tremolo but that seems unnecessary and weaker to me);

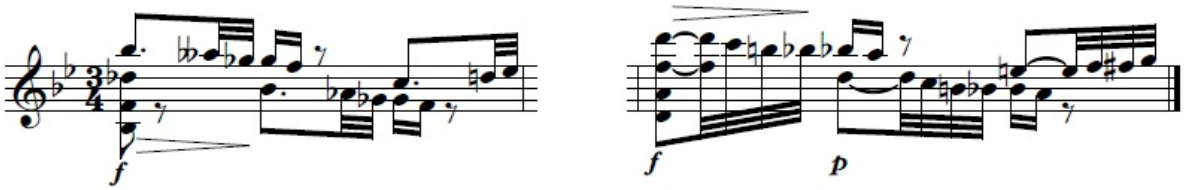


Example 30: E. Ysaÿe, *Sonata no. 1,* I. Grave, mm. 42-46.

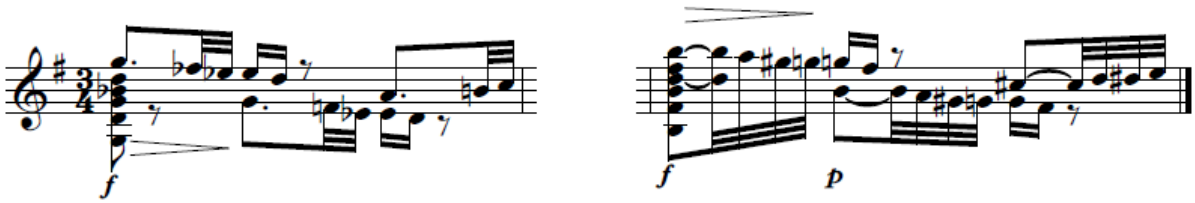


Example 31: E. Ysaÿe*, Sonata no. 1, I. Grave,* mm. 42-46, guitar transcription.

3) Occasionally, some chords can be reinforced by adding extra notes. Given the predominantly strict polyphonic writing of the piece this solution must be carefully adopted, but there are places where it definitely helps creating a more convincing sonority (ex. 32 and 33);

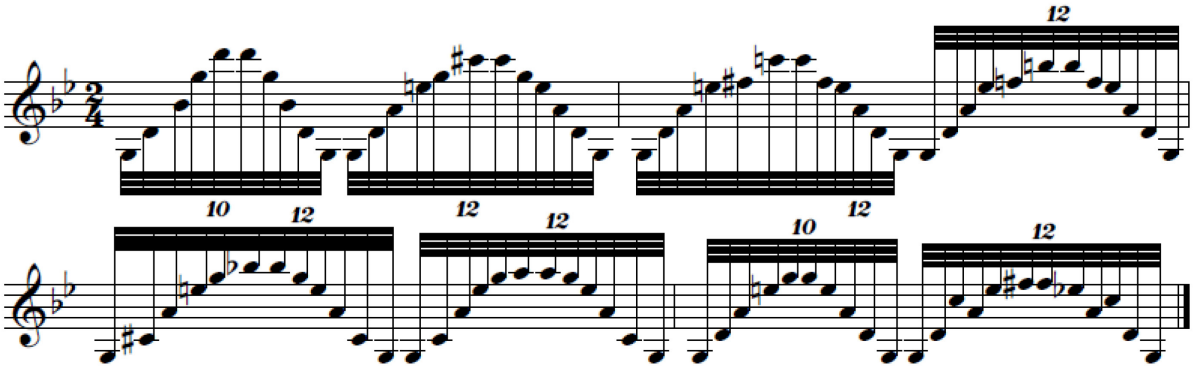


Example 32: E. Ysaÿe, *Sonata no. 1,* I. Grave, mm. 19, 22.

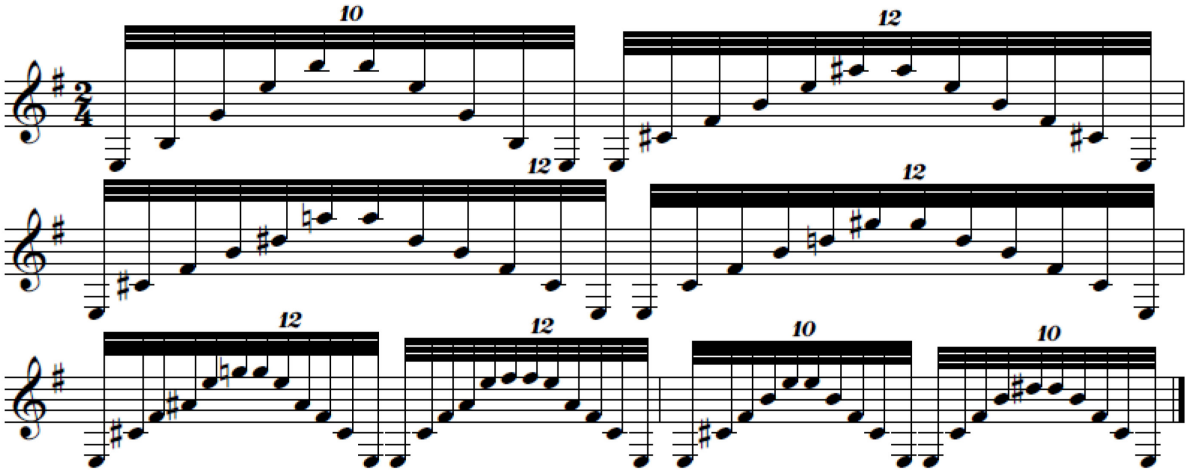


Example 33: E. Ysaÿe, *Sonata no. 1,* I. Grave, mm. 19, 22*,* guitar transcription.

4) A complete revoicing is needed in the fast arpeggio section that closes the fugato (ex. 34 and 35). These leaps are very idiomatic for violin, but fortunately they are mainly groups of 12 notes, which would nicely translate to the guitar (having six strings, that makes it very natural). The result is barely a rearrangement of the inner voices, without touching the two external lines;

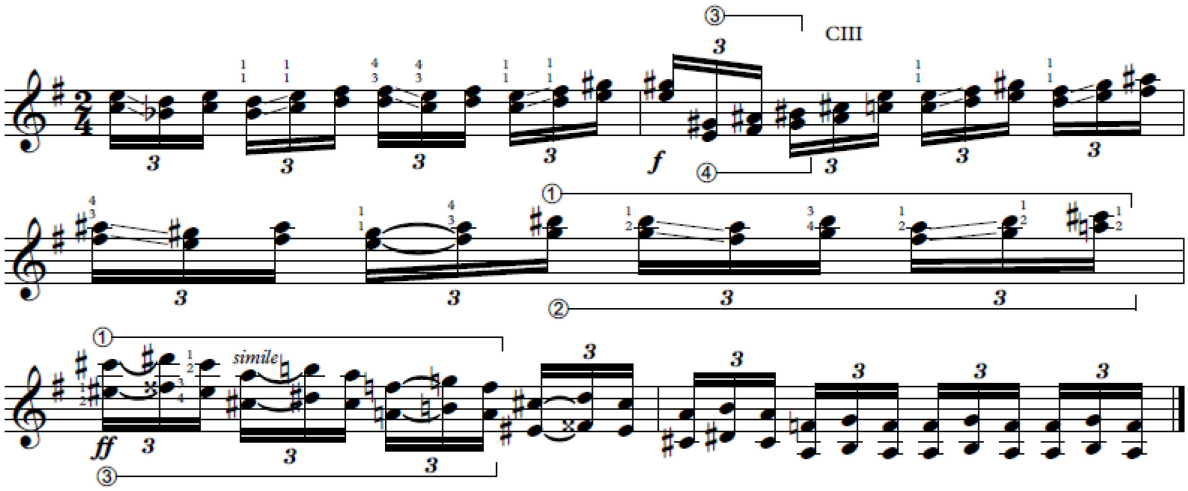


Example 34: E. Ysaÿe*, Sonata no. 1, II. Fugato,* mm. 103-105.



Example 35: E. Ysaÿe*, Sonata no. 1, II. Fugato,* mm. 103-105, guitar transcription.

5) A recurring gesture through the four movements of the Sonata is the fast patterns of ascending or descending thirds (or its inversion, sixths). While this, *per se,* is not anti-idiomatic on the guitar, the rapidity of execution that the combined action of the bow and the slide of left hand can achieve on the violin is not easily reproducible on the transcription. A solution can be found by alternating slurs and plucked notes in a fashion that allows the right agility while preserving the natural phrasing of the passage (see ex. 36). The interpreter could feel free and experiment in order to find the right compromise.



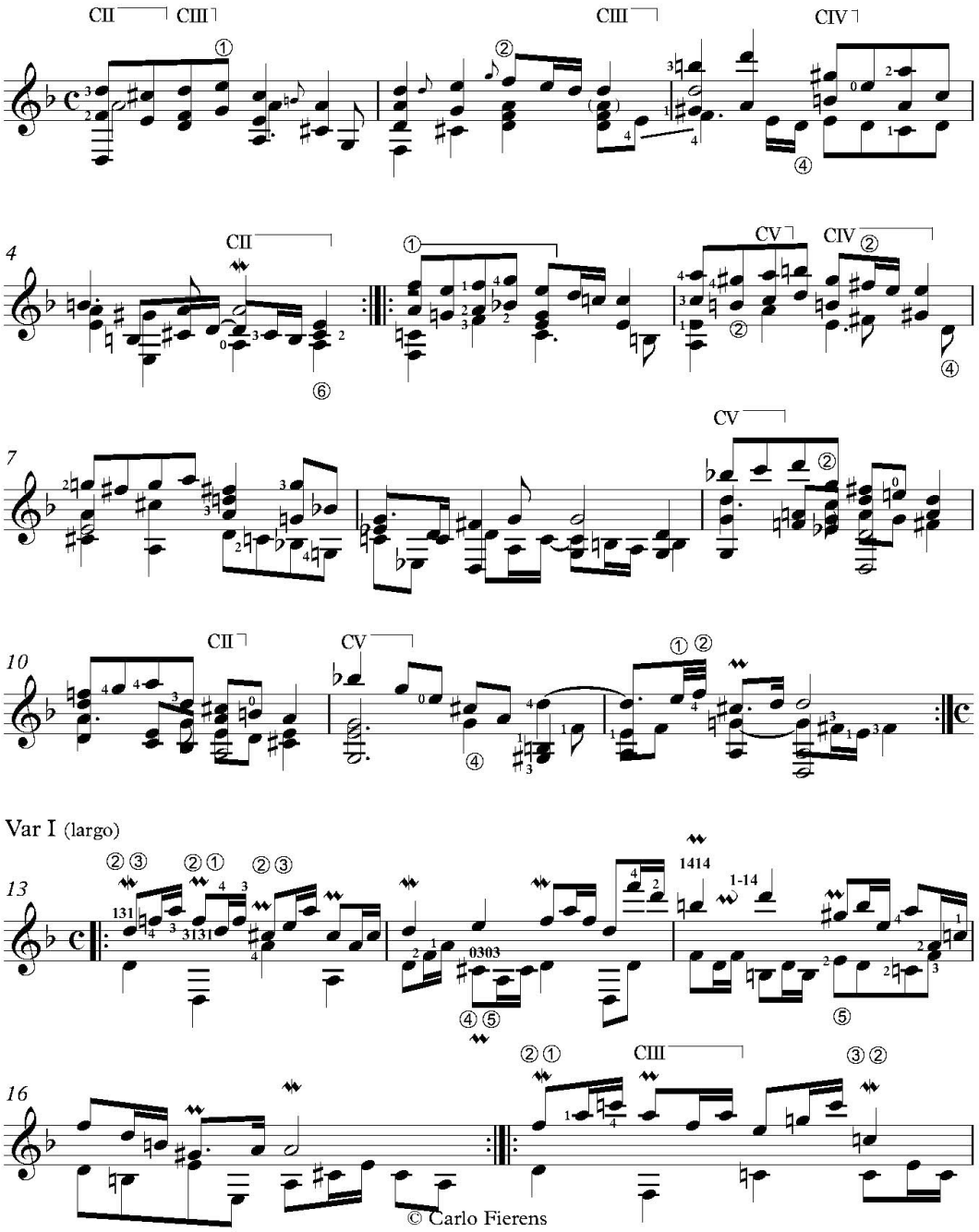
Example 36: E. Ysaÿe, *Sonata no. 1, II. Fugato*, mm. 68-72, guitar transcription.

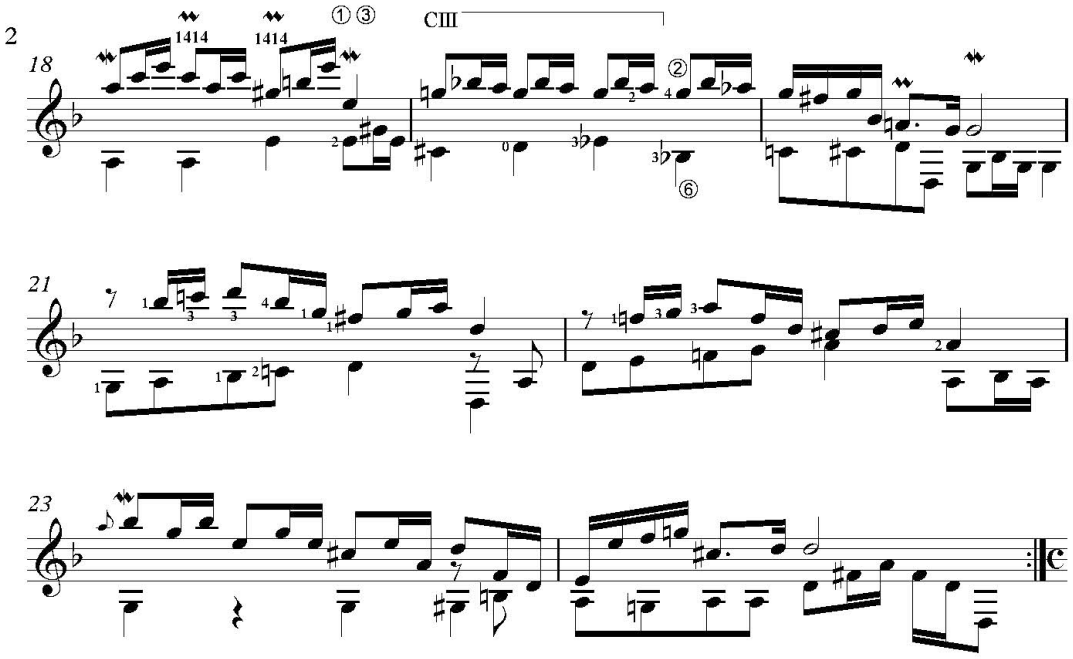
Appendix: Scores

Aria Variata
'alla maniera italiana' BWV 989

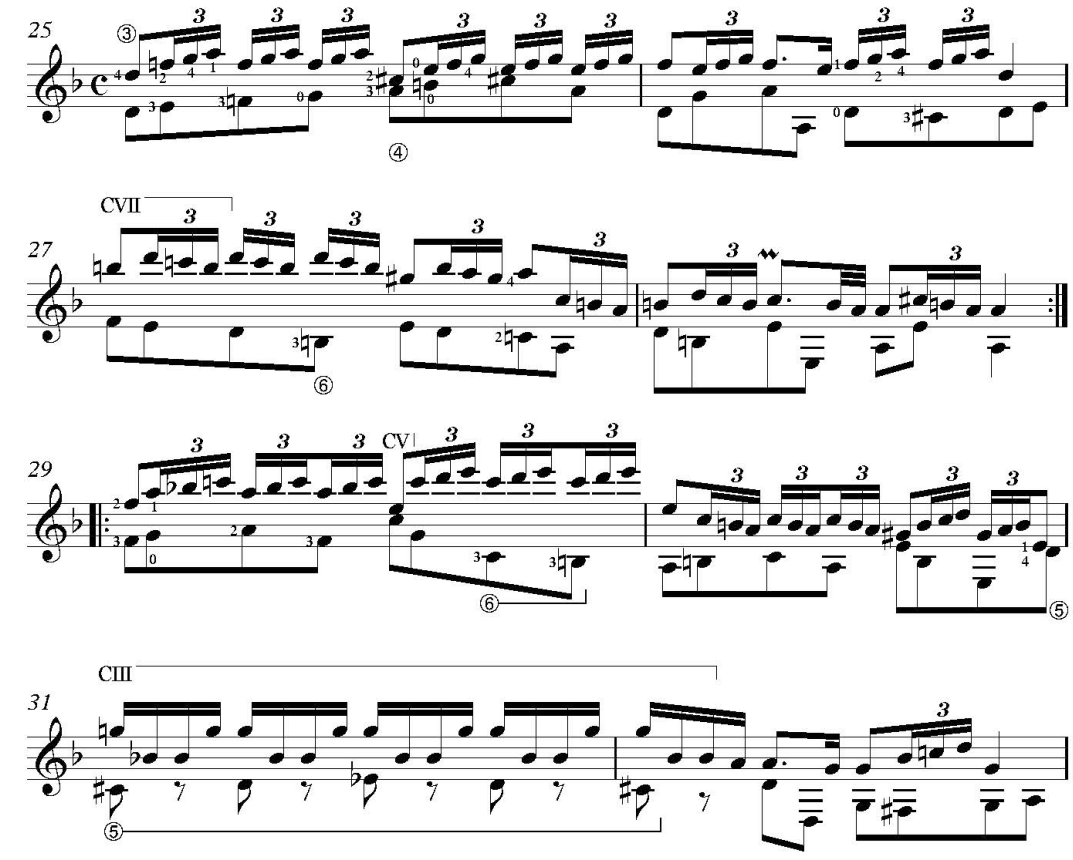
J. S. Bach

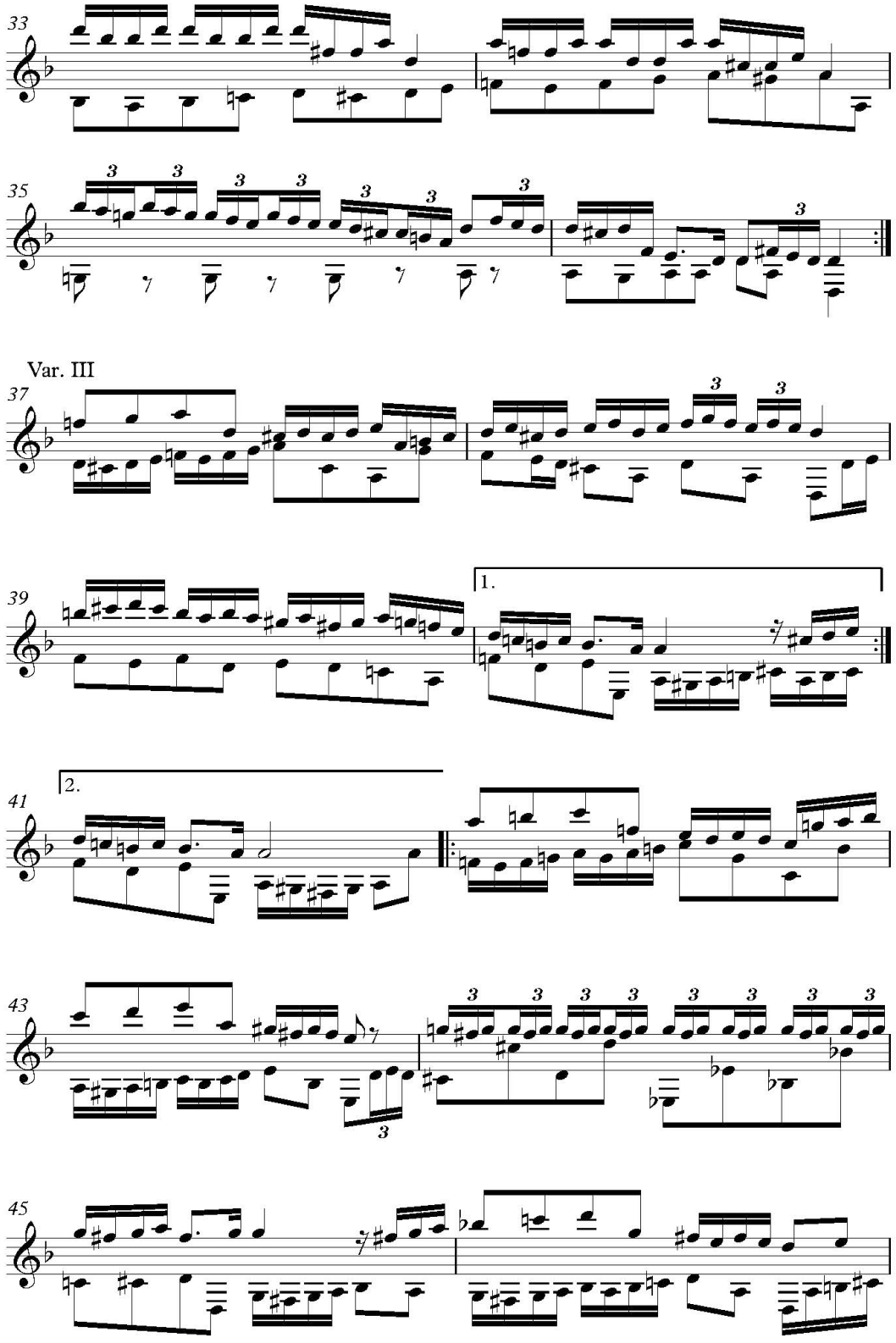
Transcription: Carlo Fierens

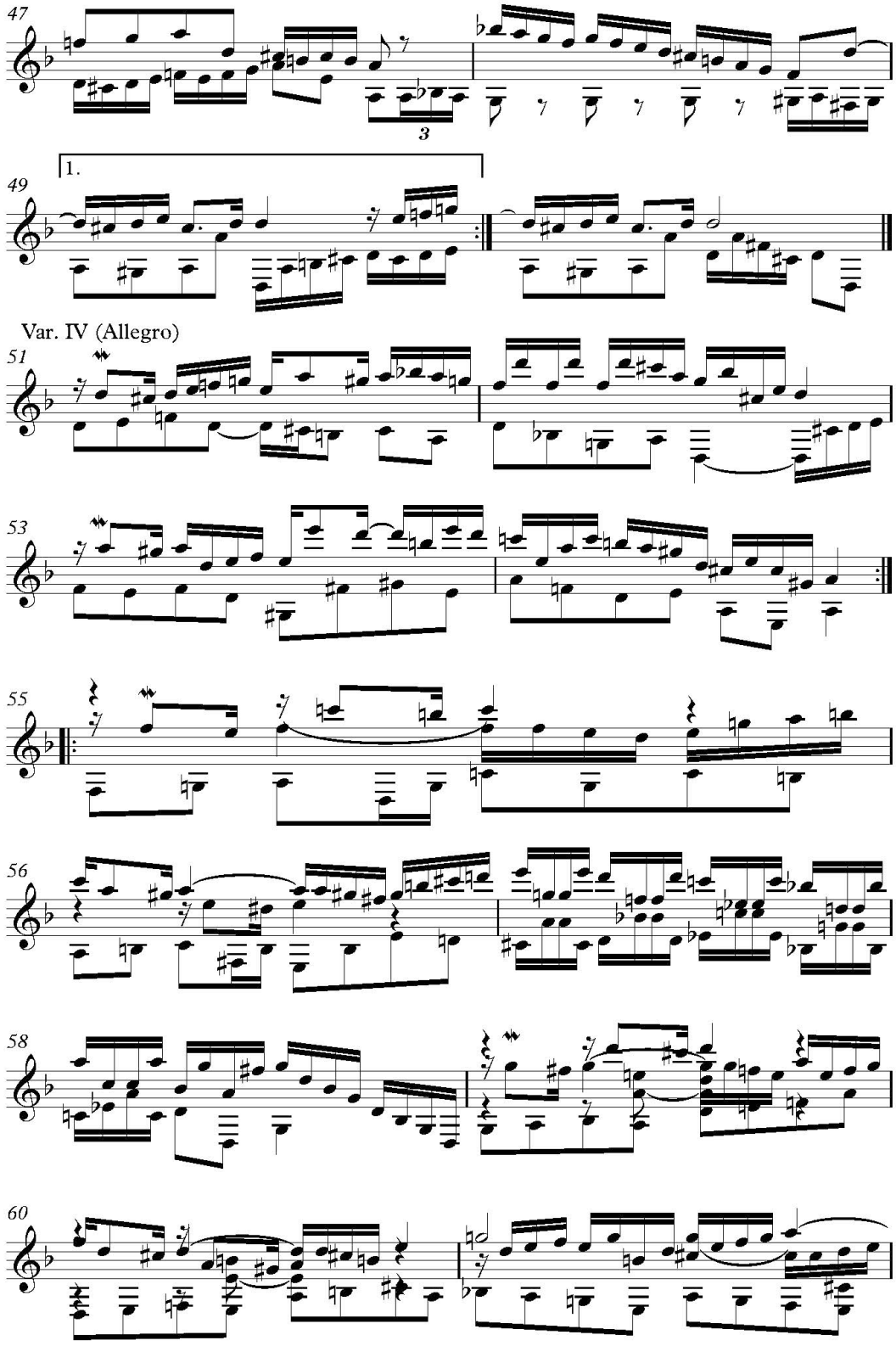


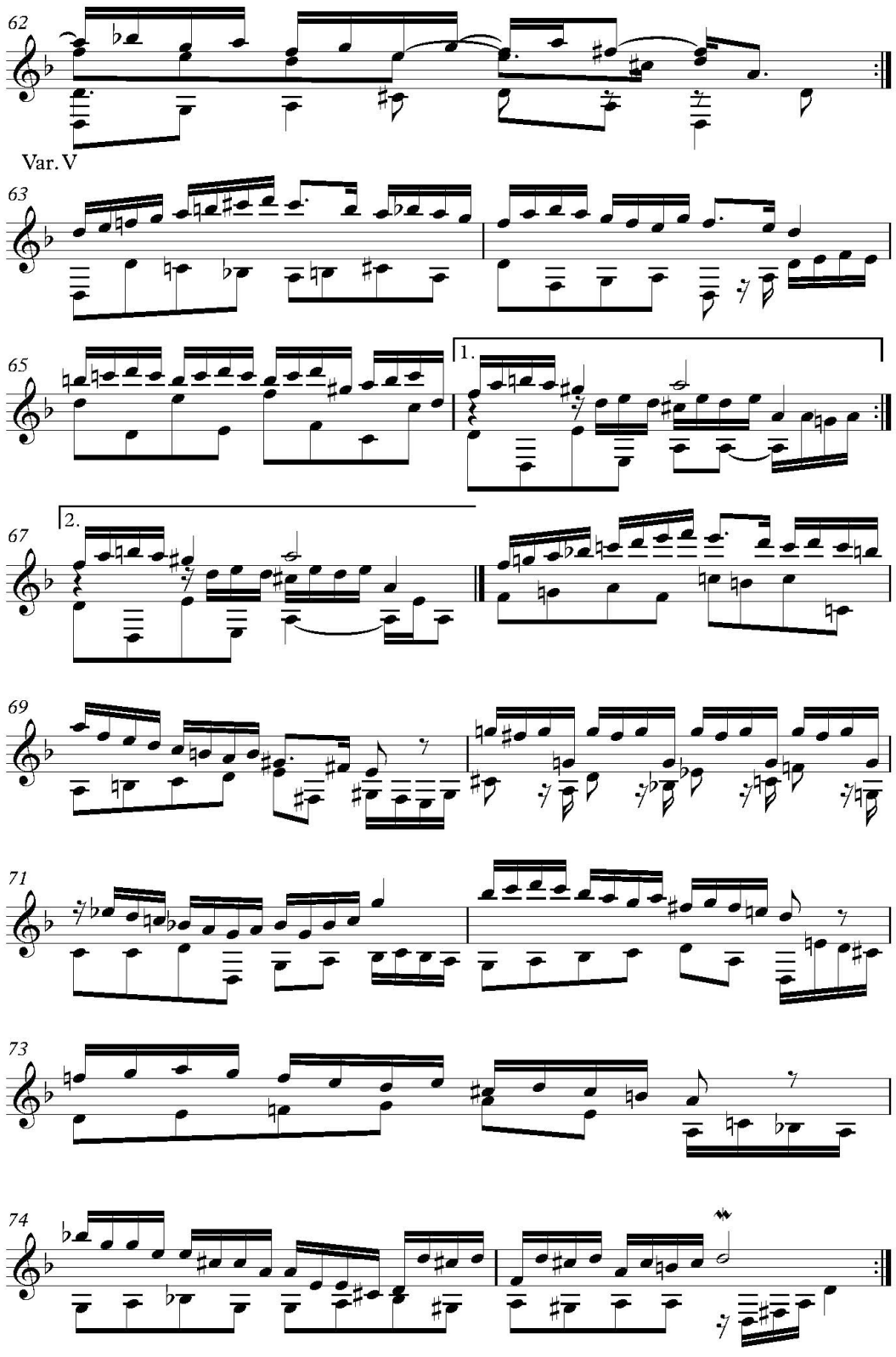


Var. II

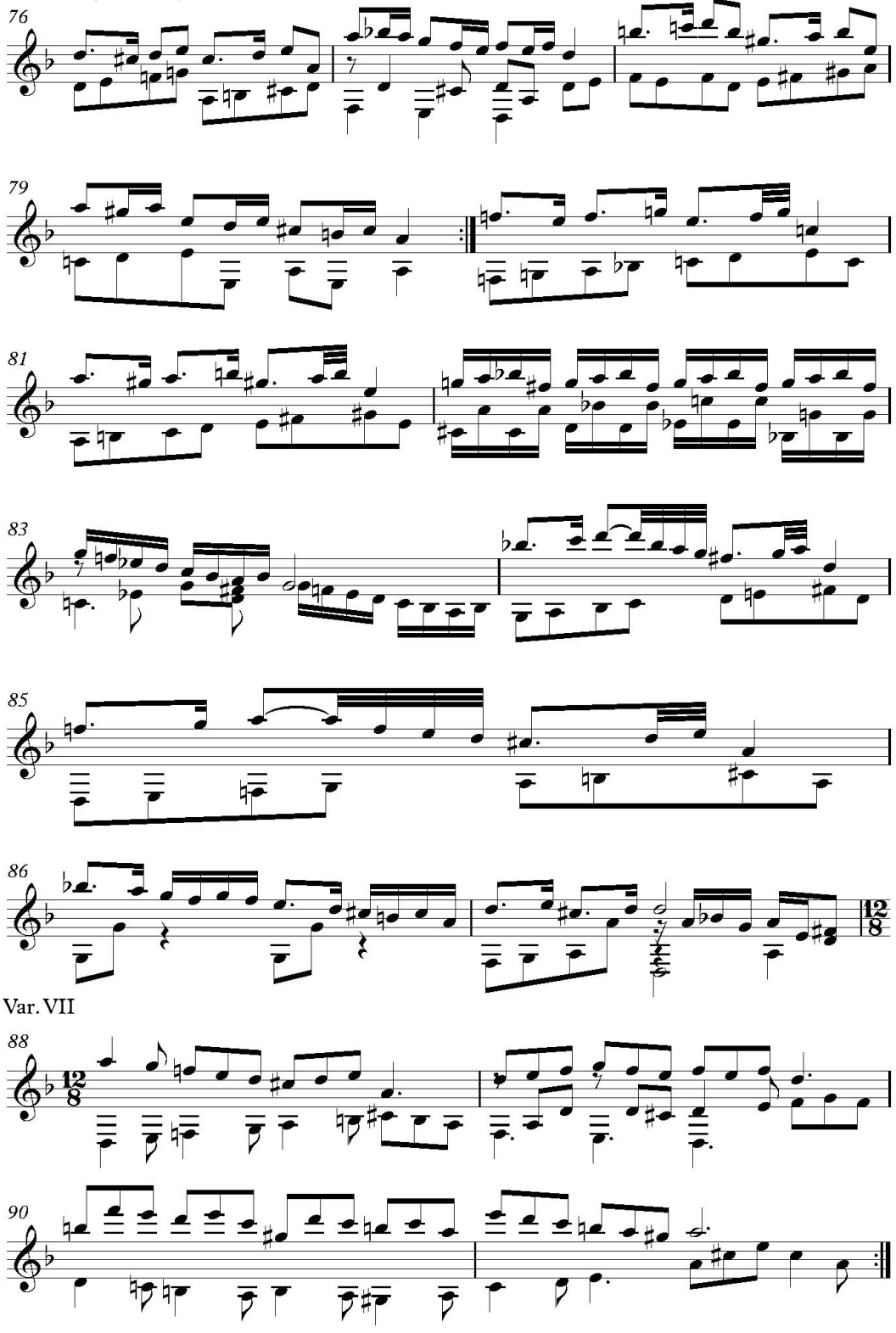



33
35
Var. III
37
39
1.
41
2.
43
45

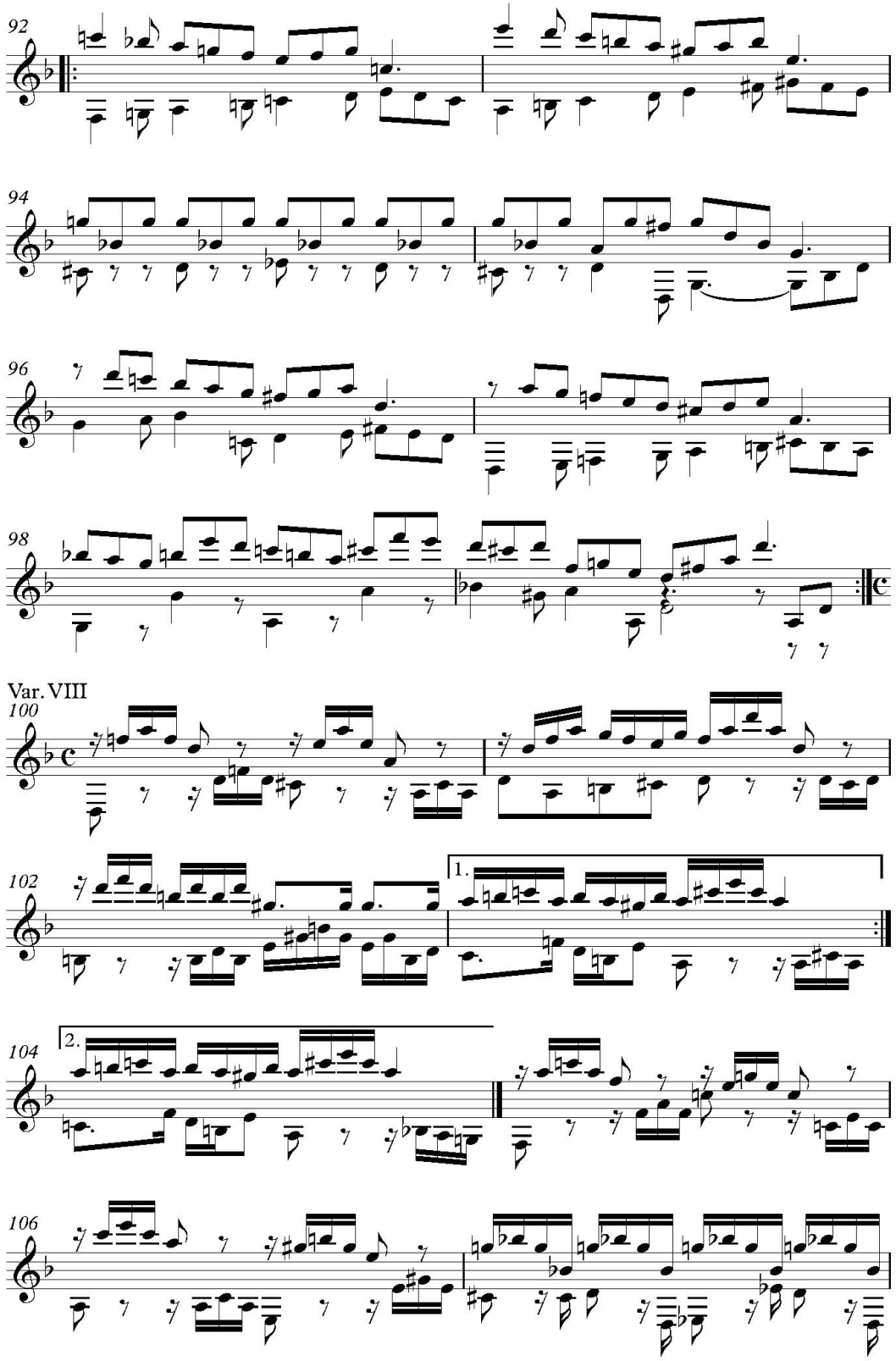

47
3
49
1.
Var. IV (Allegro)
51
53
55
56
58
60

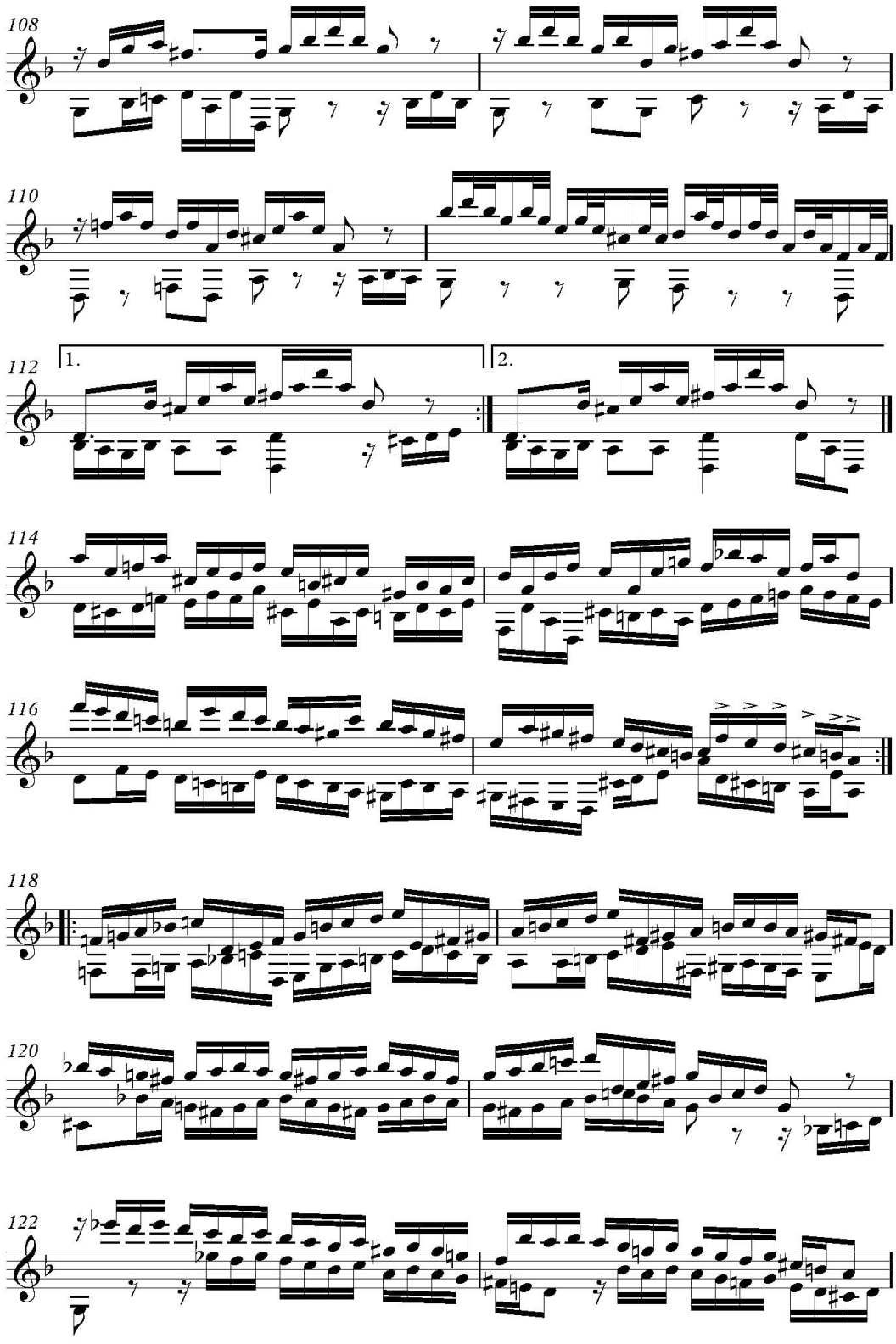

62
Var. V
63
65
1.
67
2.
69
71
73
74

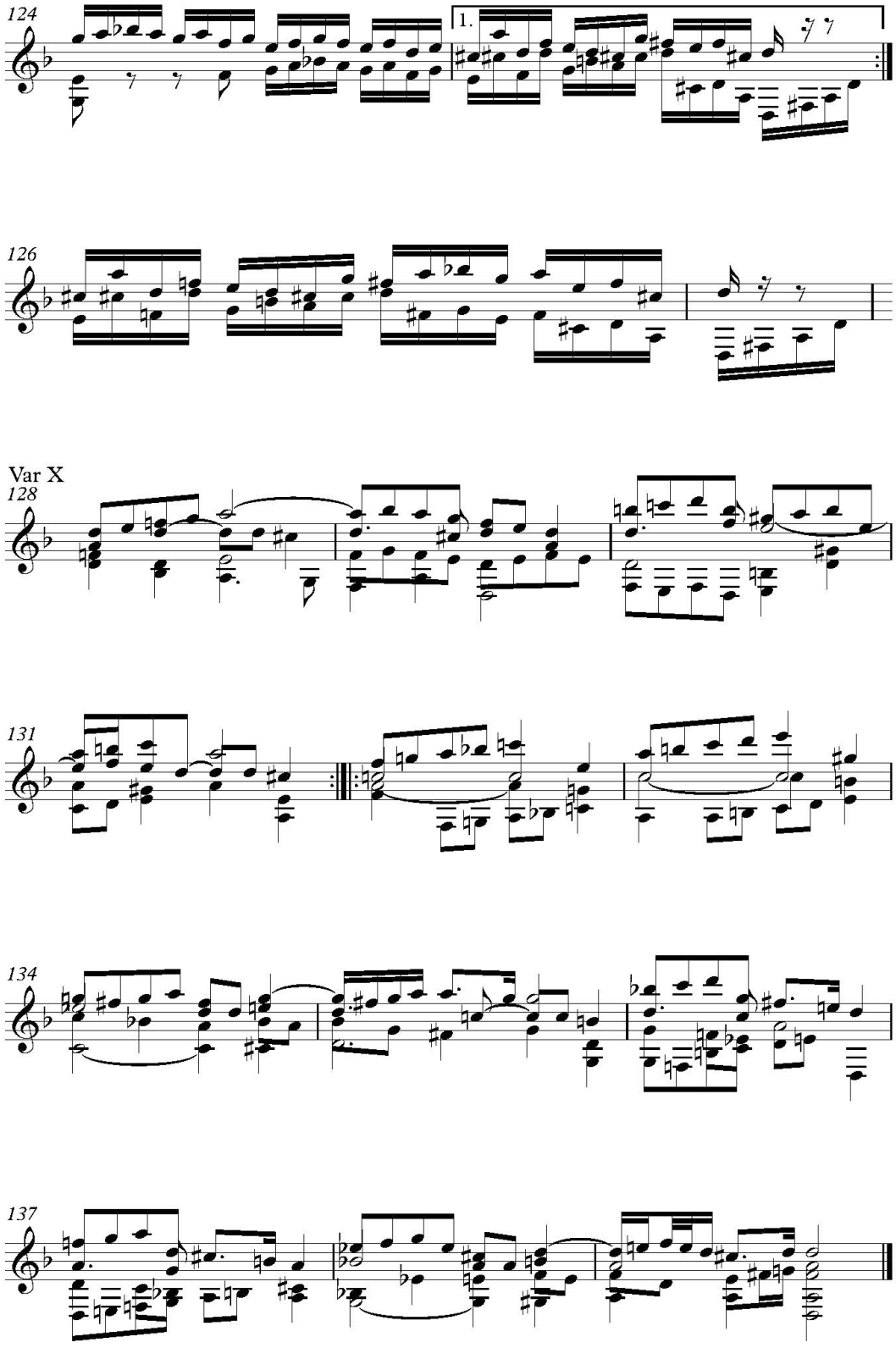
Var. VI (Andante)



Var. VII


92
94
96
98
Var. VIII
100
102
1.
104
2.
106

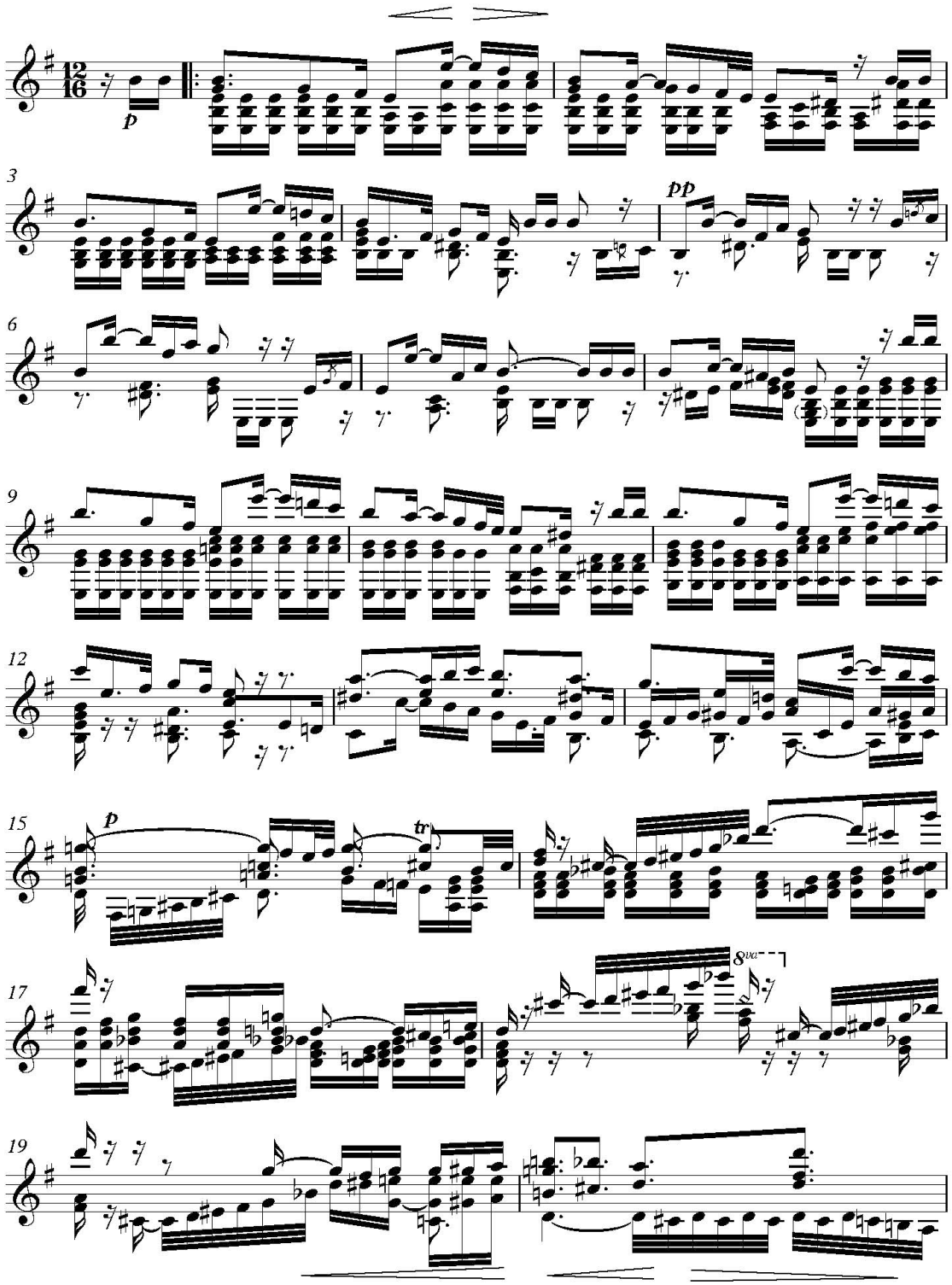

108
110
112
1.
2.
114
116
118
120
122

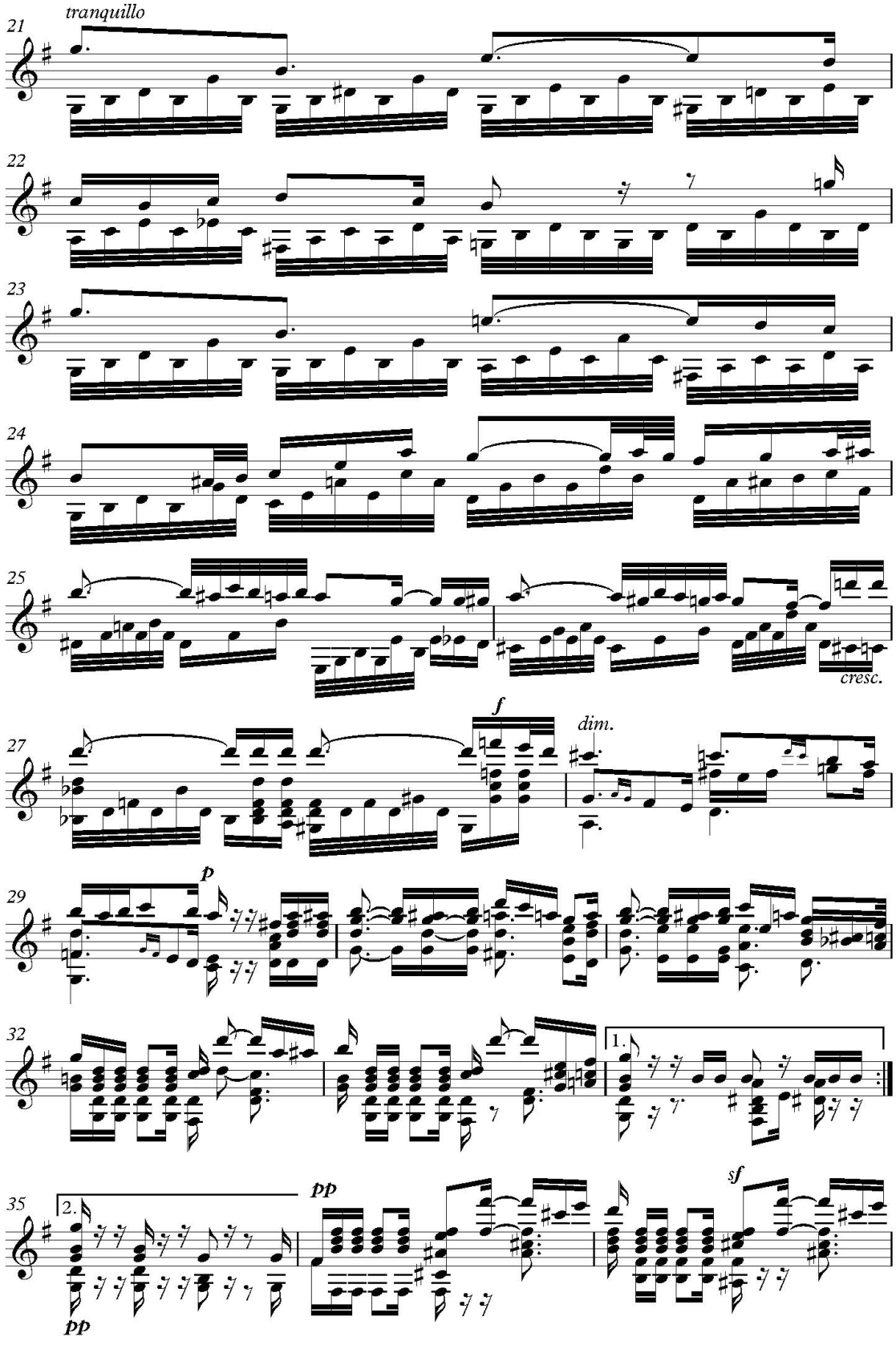

124
1.
126
Var X
128
131
134
137

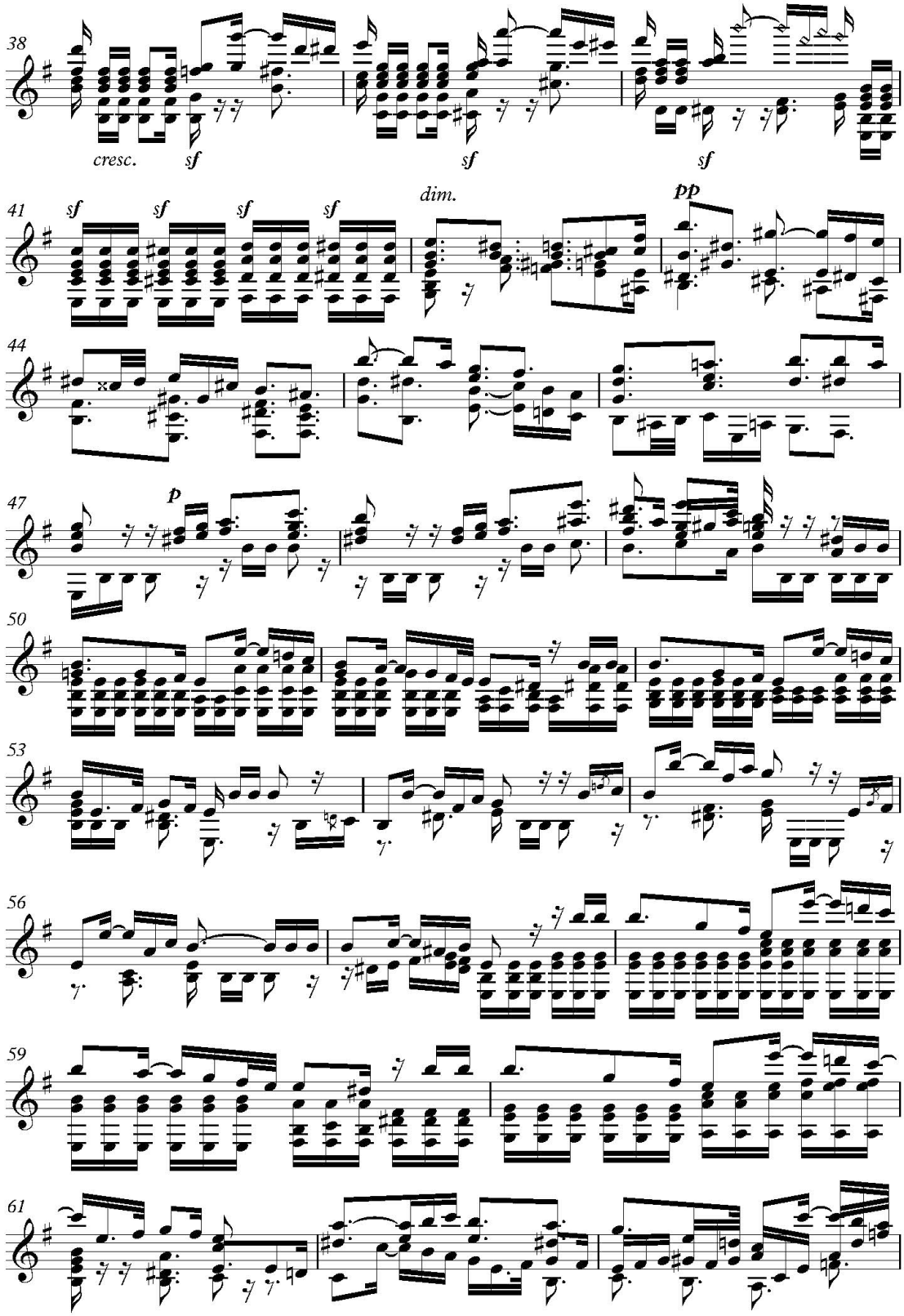
II. Adagio molto, e assai espressivo.

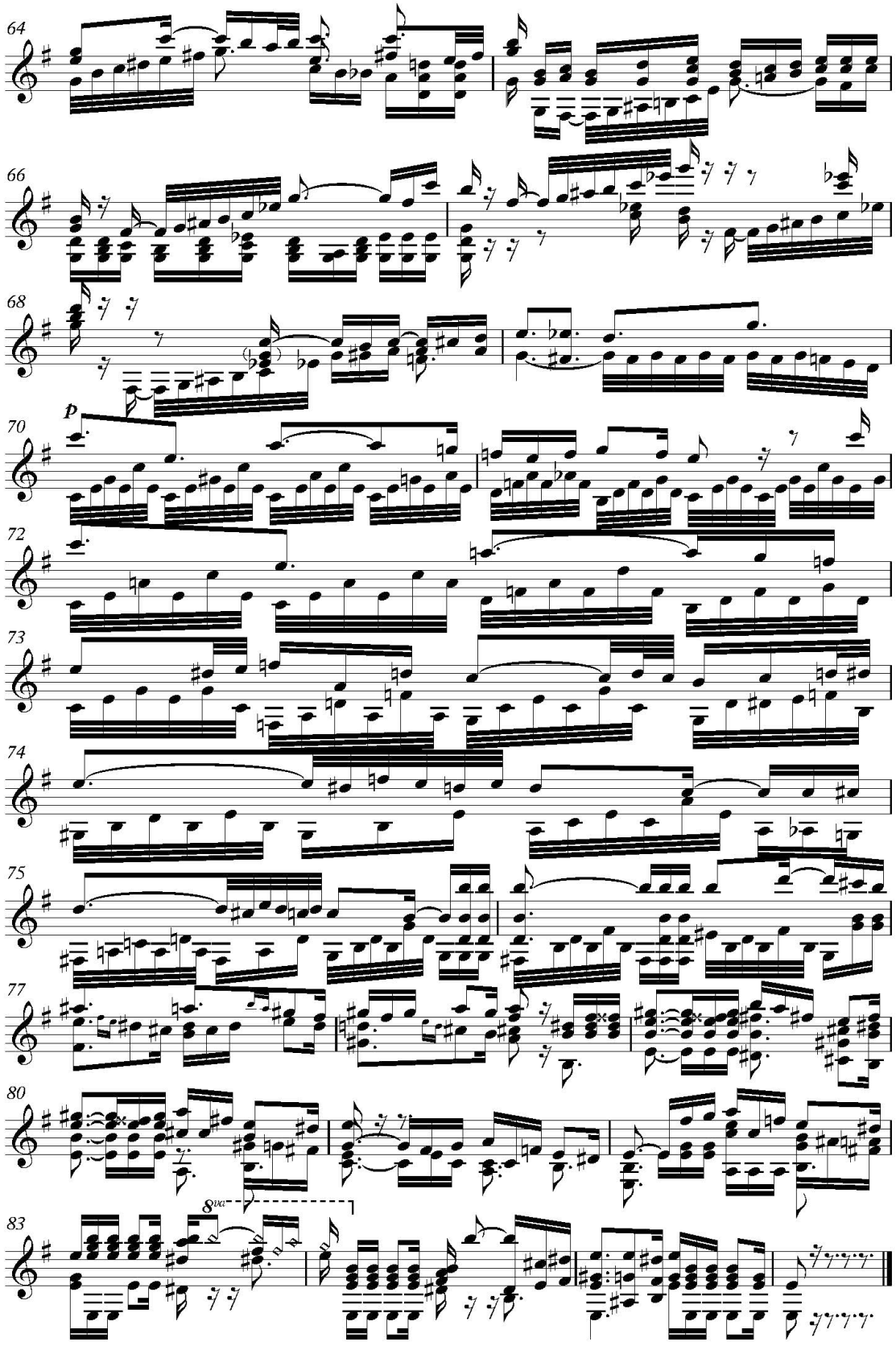
Transcription: Carlo Fierens

Richard Wagner




tranquillo
21
22
23
24
25
cresc.
27
f
dim.
29
p
32
1.
35
2.
pp
pp
sf

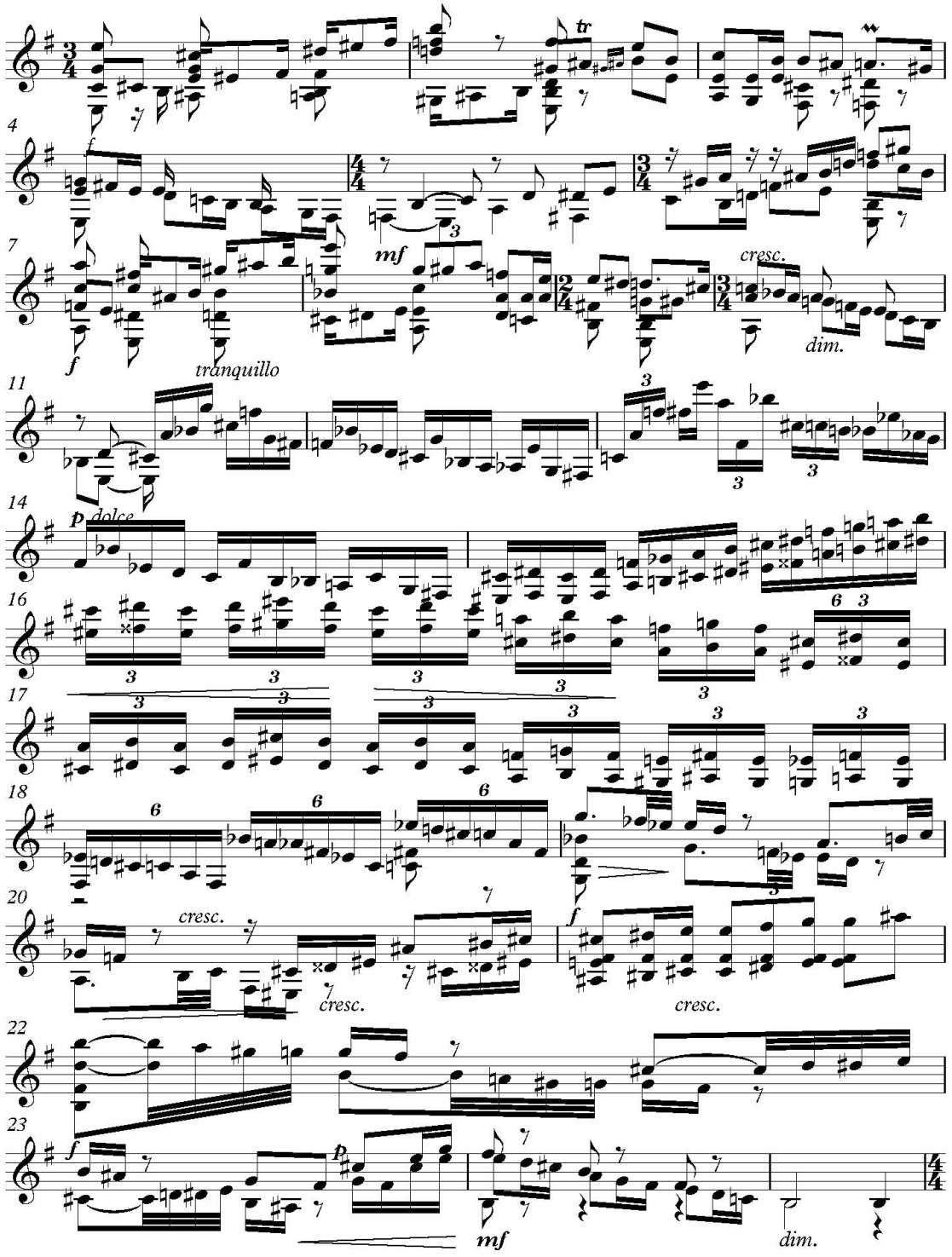

38
cresc.
sf
sf
sf
41
sf
sf
sf
sf
dim.
pp
44
47
p
50
53
56
59
61

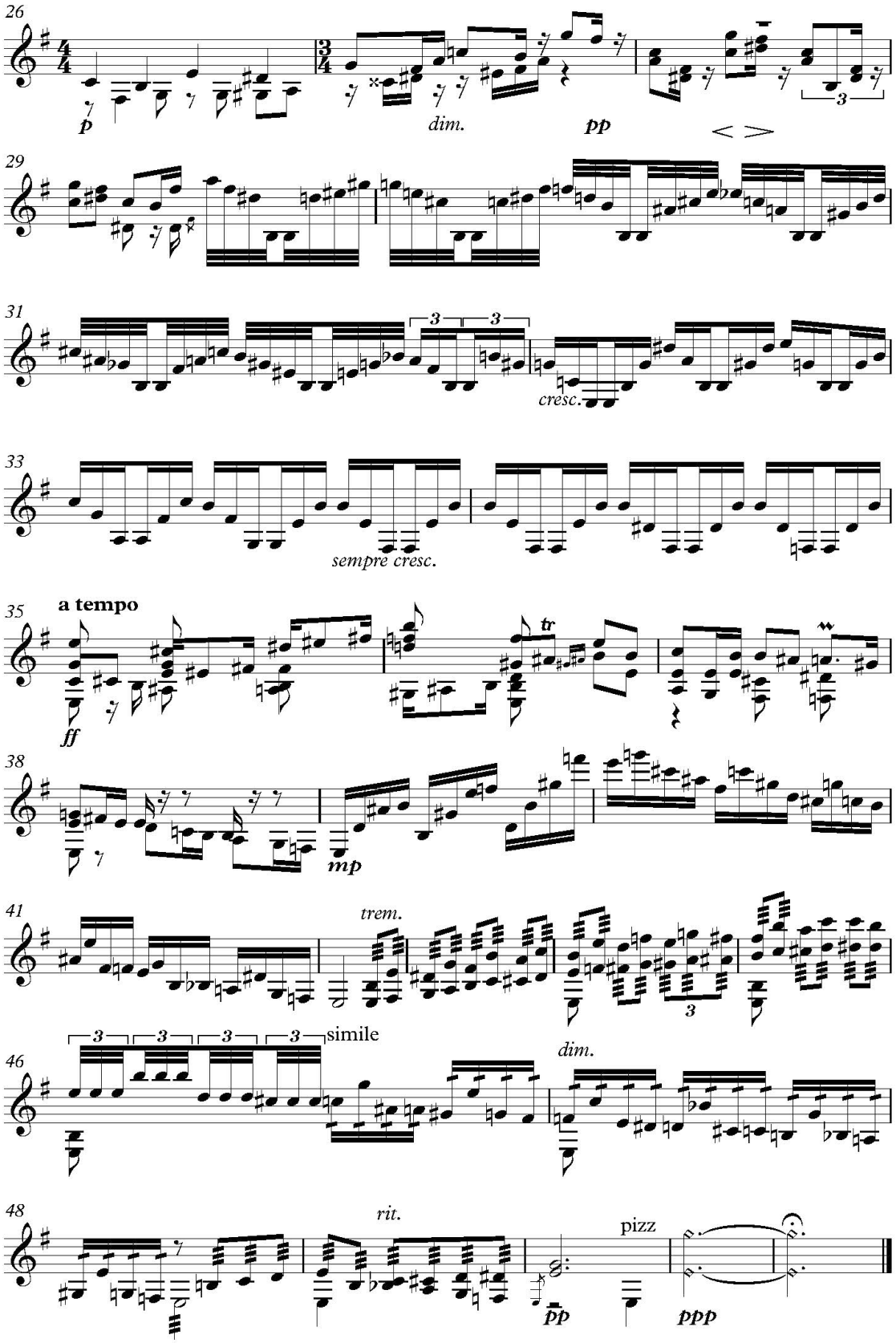

64
66
68
p
70
72
73
74
75
77
80
8va
83

Sonate n° 1
I. Grave

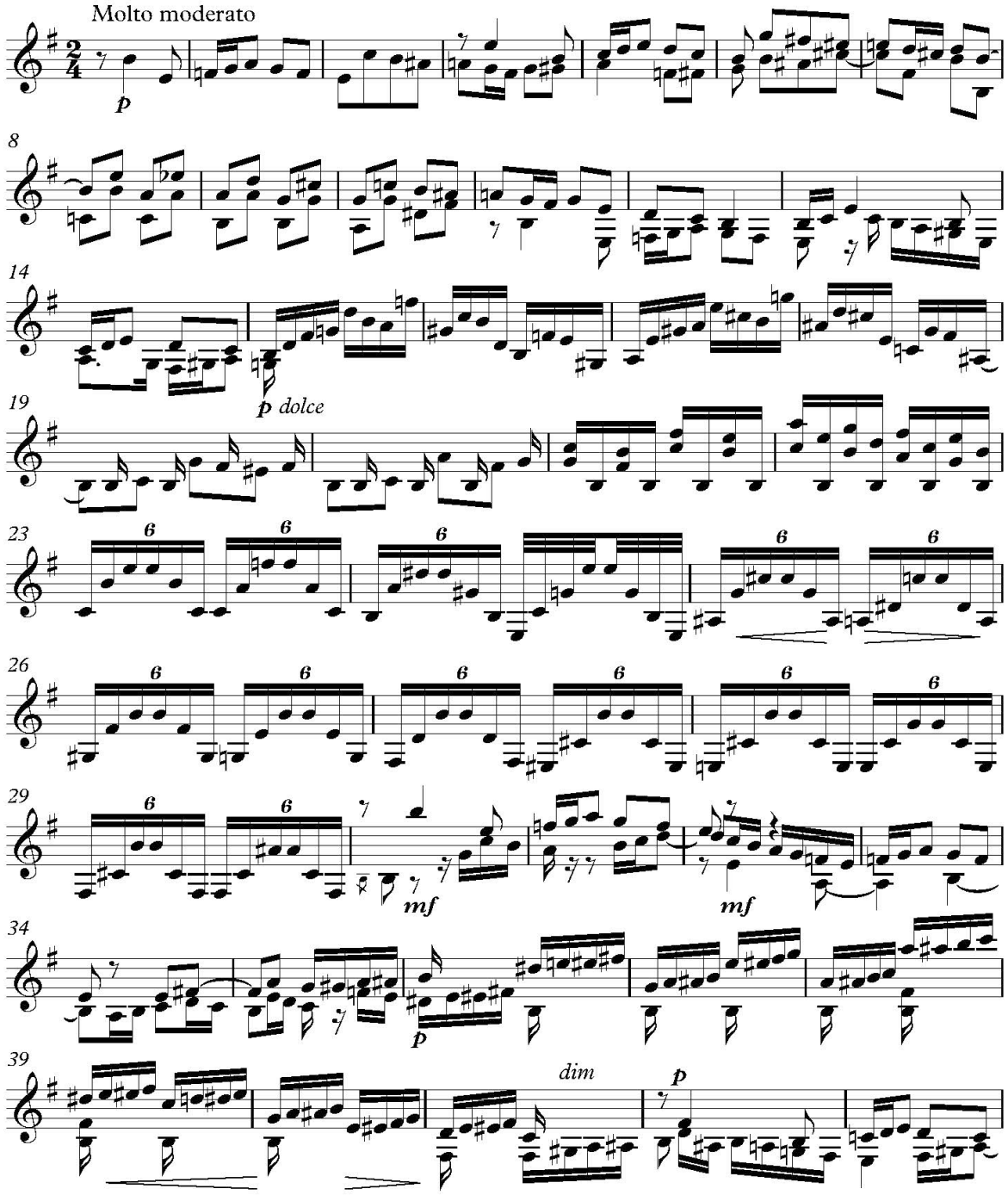
E. Ysaÿe

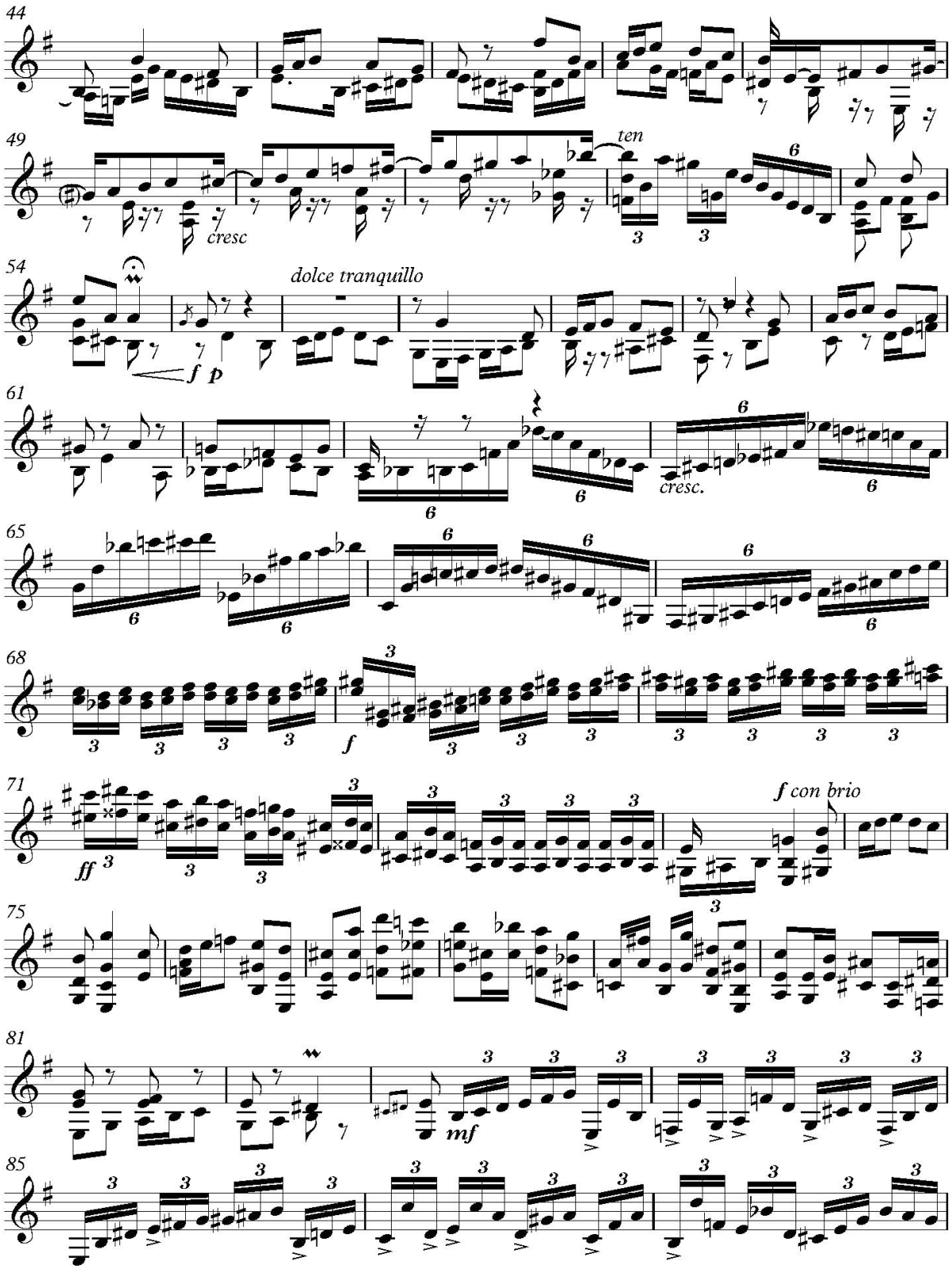
Transcription: Carlo Fierens

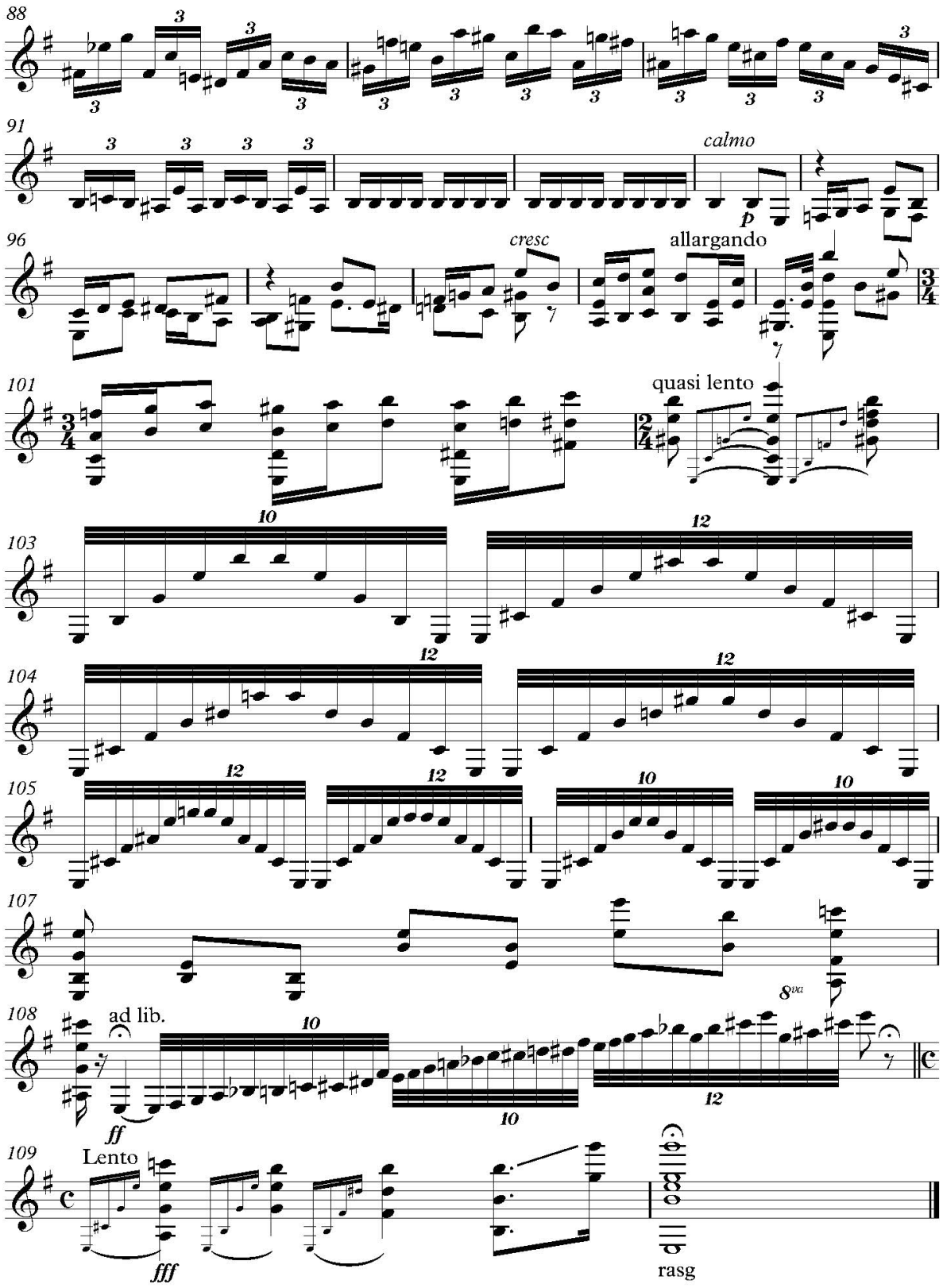



26
p
dim.
pp
29
31
3
3
cresc.
33
sempre cresc.
35
a tempo
ff
tr
38
mp
41
trem.
3
46
3
3
3
3
simile
dim.
48
rit.
pizz
pp
ppp

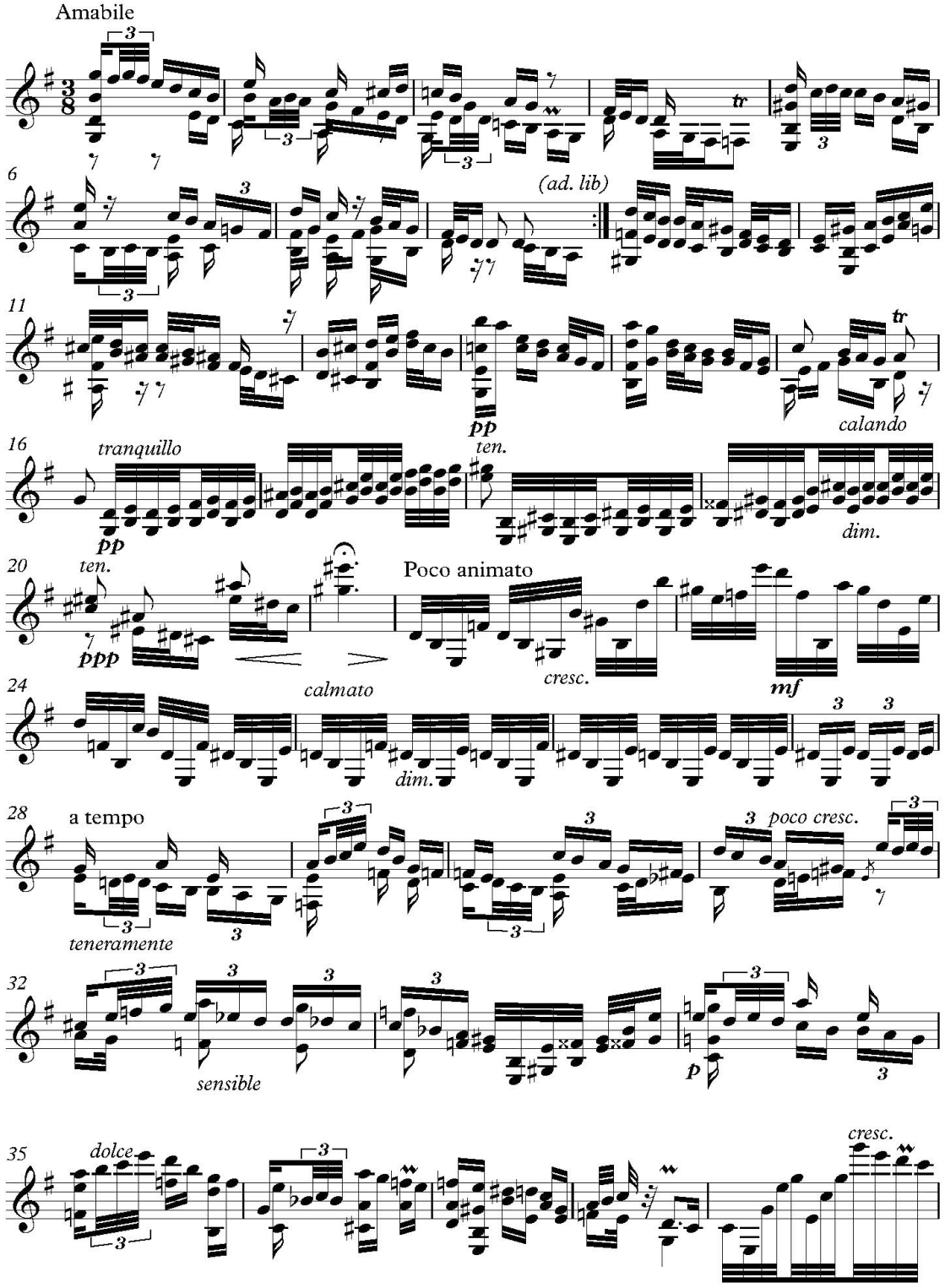
II. Fugato

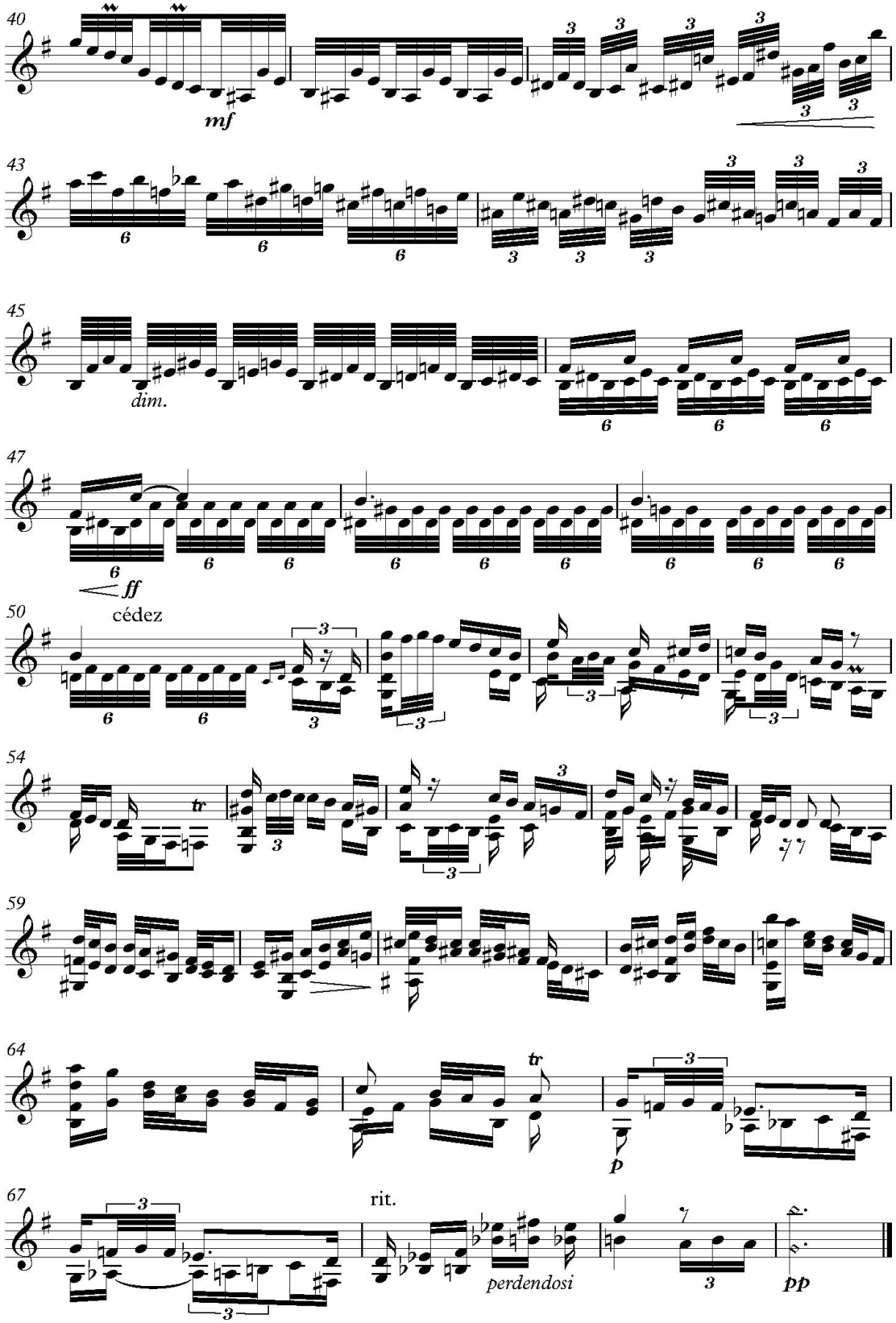



44
49
cresc
ten
54
dolce tranquillo
f p
61
cresc.
65
68
f
71
ff
f con brio
75
81
mf
85

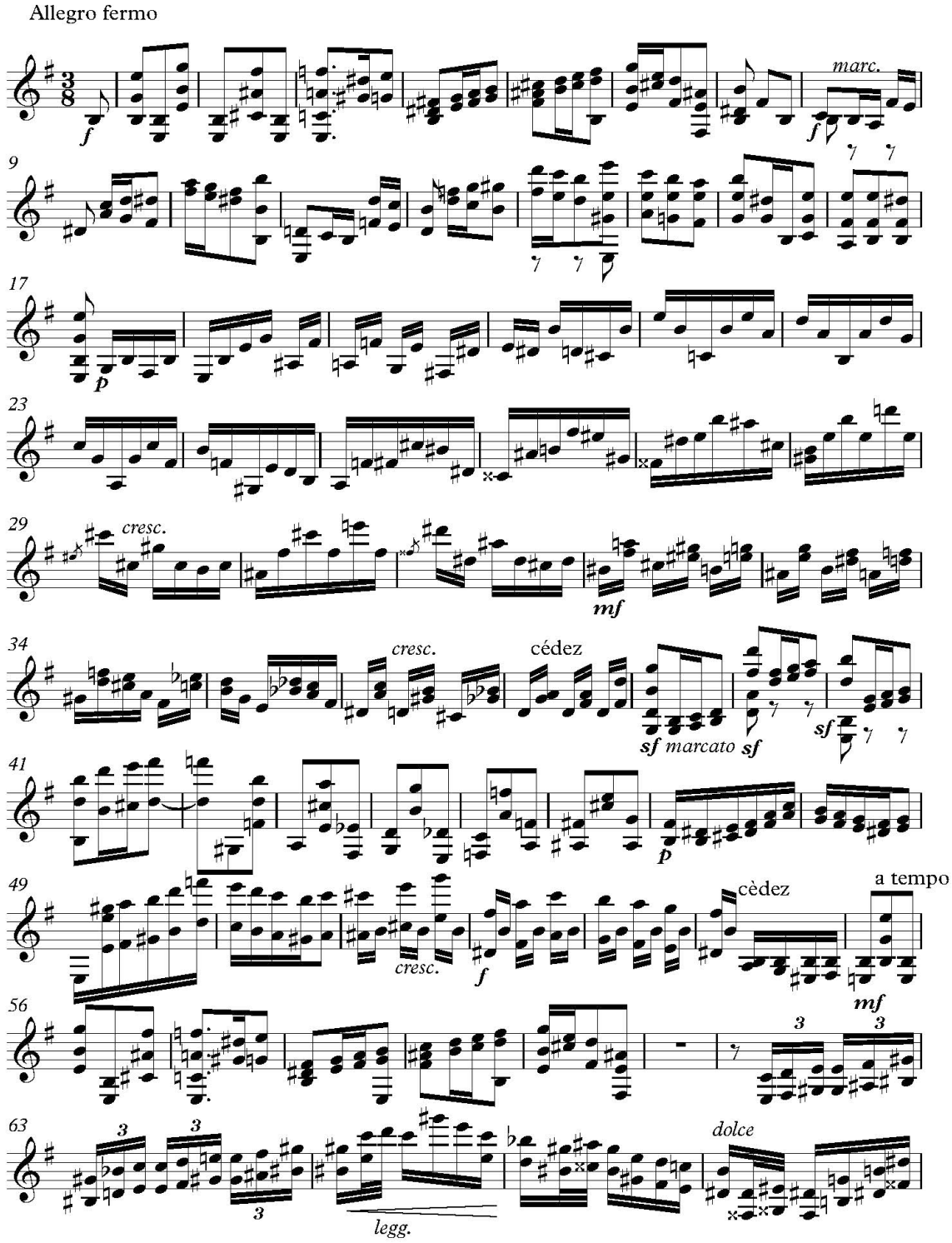

88
91
calmo
p
96
cresc
allargando
101
quasi lento
103
104
105
107
8va
108
ad lib.
ff
109
Lento
fff
rasg

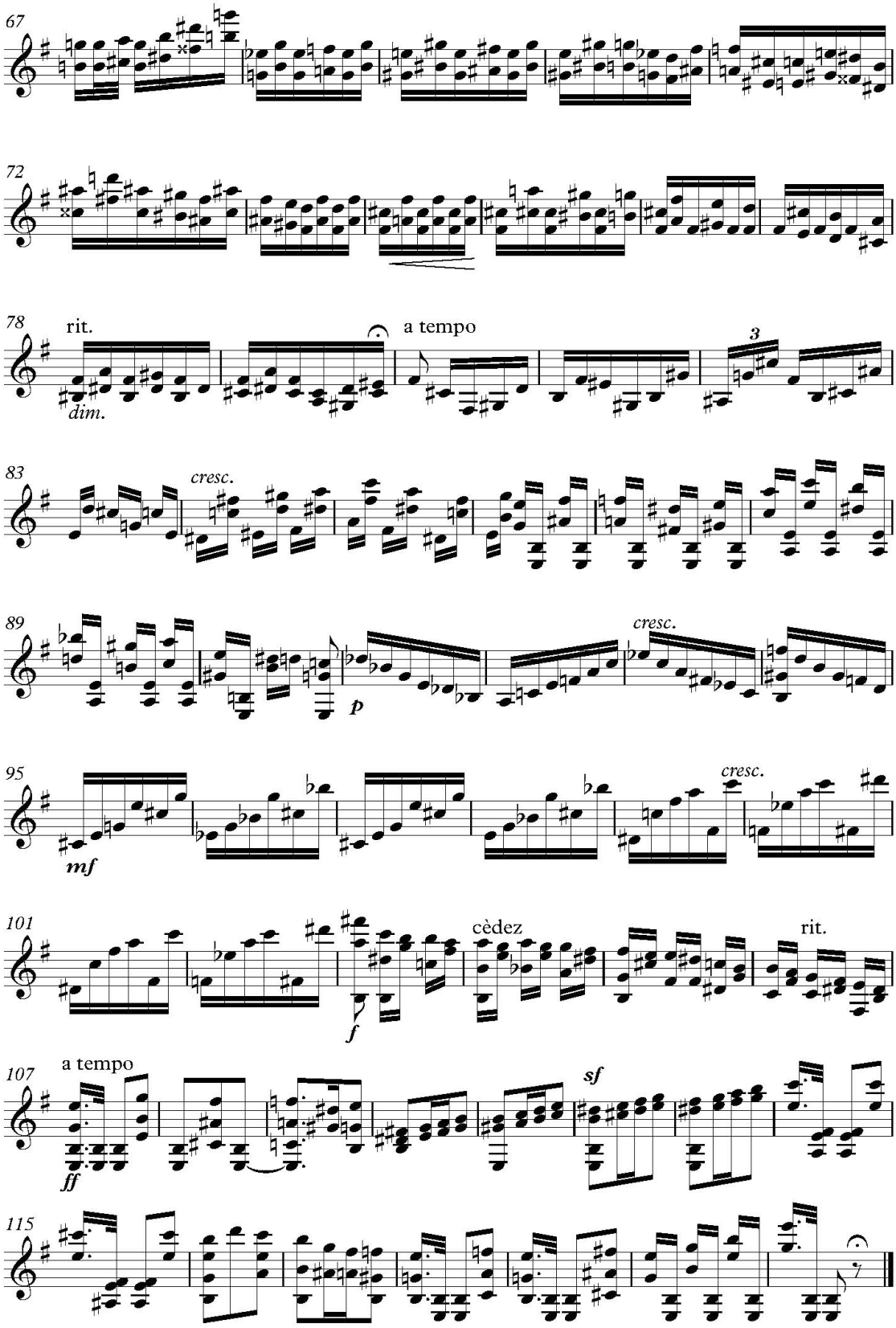
III. Allegretto poco scherzoso




40
mf
43
45
dim.
47
ff
50
cédez
54
tr
59
64
tr
p
67
rit.
perdendosi
pp

IV Finale


Allegro fermo
marc.
cresc.
mf
cresc.
cédez
sf marcato
sf
sf
p
cresc.
f
cèdez
a tempo
mf
dolce
legg.


67
72
78
rit.
dim.
a tempo
3
83
cresc.
89
p
cresc.
95
mf
cresc.
101
f
cèdez
rit.
107
a tempo
ff
sf
115

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